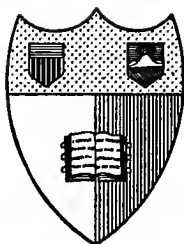


SIDNEY YORKE'S FRIEND



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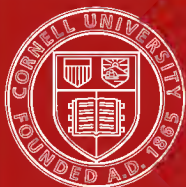
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SIDNEY YORKE'S FRIEND.



Without a moment's hesitation he emptied his pockets'

p. 95.

SIDNEY YORKE'S FRIEND.

BY
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SIDNEY YORKE'S FRIEND.

CHAPTER I.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

It was a cold, dismal Sunday afternoon in January; a piercing wind and constant showers of sleet made the shelter of home and a warm fire a very attractive prospect to those who were struggling along the wet pavements and muddy roads. The congregation of a large church on the outskirts of the manufacturing town of Beecham was just dispersing, everyone bent on getting home as quickly as possible. They were all so occupied with their own discomfort that none of them had a thought to bestow on one who plainly had no pleasant home or cheerful fire to go to. Perhaps it was scarcely surprising that the well-dressed and highly-respectable congregation should pass by without a glance on one who was so shabby, so miserable.

No one knew the difference better than poor Stephen Elliot himself, and as he watched them he

did not expect to get a word or look of pity. Sometimes he wondered whether any of these well-to-do people had ever known what it was to feel as he felt then, but for the most part he was taken up with a pressing need, which was making itself more and more felt every moment. He was hungry—in fact, starving—and he had not a farthing to buy food. For the last hour he had hardly had energy to move, and he was now leaning against the railings of a garden, wondering dreamily what would come of it, and why he felt so utterly wretched. Once or twice he had thought of asking for help, but begging did not come easy to him, and he hesitated so long before speaking that he failed to attract any attention. When at last he did make an effort, a look of indifference was all he received, and he fell back repulsed and hopeless.

‘Better starve than try that again,’ he muttered; ‘perhaps I can get work to-morrow. I must try and last out till then.’

But his movements had attracted the attention of a lad about his own age who had passed him and was still lingering near. ‘I wonder if there’s any-

thing the matter with him,' he thought, 'or whether he is a regular hand at it? I dare say he is. I'll go back again and see if he begs of me.' Stephen looked rather wistfully at him, but made no further attempt. 'Perhaps he does not want anything after all; but he looks uncommonly bad. I really think —— Well, I shall have to speak to him if I want any peace of mind;' and, with a half-laugh at himself, Sidney Yorke turned back again.

'Is anything the matter?' he said, as Stephen turned towards him. 'Are you in any trouble?'

Stephen Elliot looked at the friendly face of the other, and felt convinced that at least he would believe him. 'Yes, sir,' he said, slowly, 'I am starving! I've had nothing to eat all day, and I—and I—don't know what to do!'

'I'm awfully sorry,' said Sidney. 'I don't believe I have a penny with me, and we live right away at the other end of the town. You don't live here, I suppose?'

'No, sir; I only came yesterday. I tried to get work but I couldn't find any. I would work, indeed, if I got the chance.'

Sidney nodded. 'The first thing to do is to get something to eat,' he said, looking up and down the road. 'If I could only drop upon anyone I know — Ah! there's Blake. I'll be back in a minute;' and he dashed off in pursuit of a boy who had just disappeared round the corner of the road. It seemed a long time to poor Stephen before he returned, and he had almost made up his mind that he was forgotten, when Sidney came running back. 'There!' he said, breathlessly, handing Stephen a large hunch of bread and meat, 'Blake's mother was out, so that is all we could get hold of. But that will keep you going till to-morrow, won't it?'

'Yes, sir, thank you,' said Stephen, gratefully.

'Then to-morrow you come up to our place,' went on his new friend, 'and I'll ask my father if he can give you some work. I dare say he will manage to find you a corner somewhere if I ask him and you would like to try.'

'Indeed I should, sir.'

'Well then, anyone will tell you where Yorke's factory is, and we live close by it. Stay a minute, I'll write it down for you;' and producing a letter

from his pocket he scribbled a few words on the envelope and handed it to Stephen. 'Now, you come up early to-morrow morning and send that in to me, and we'll see what we can do. Good-bye; mind you come,' and with a friendly nod, Sidney Yorke hurried off without waiting for any more thanks.

There was not much fear of his failing to do that, Stephen thought, as he looked after him; and then he speedily set to work on the food so opportunely provided. When he had eaten it he felt decidedly better, though he was still as far as ever from a shelter for the night. It was rapidly getting dark, the rain was increasing, and the wind was bitterly cold, and he shivered as he thought of the long night before him. Several times he had spent the night under a haystack, but no such shelter was available now; and though doubtless there were plenty of places where a bed could be procured for three-pence, that sum was quite beyond him; and he knew well that unless the money was forthcoming it was quite useless to beg for leave even to lie on the floor.

For some hours he wandered aimlessly about, till about midnight he heard the tramp of a policeman.

He walked slowly along, keeping as close as possible to the houses, hoping to escape observation. In vain. As the policeman overtook him, he turned the light of his lantern on Stephen's face, and exclaimed, 'Now, then, what are you up to? No good, I'll be bound. Where are you going at this time of night?'

'I—I—I——' stammered Stephen, shrinking away, 'I'm not doing anything. Why can't you let me alone? I've nowhere to go to, and I'm not doing any harm.'

'Perhaps not,' said the other, 'only intending to if you get the chance. Now, look here, young fellow, I know you'—which was a slight exaggeration, though Stephen gave a terrified start—'and I shall have my eye on you; so you had better mind what you are doing. Be off with you! If I find you loitering here again——'

'What's up, mate?' interrupted a voice on the other side of the road, as Stephen slunk off. 'What has the lad been doing?'

'I don't know that he has been doing anything,'

was the reply, 'but I don't like the look of him, and I saw him hanging about here this afternoon doing nothing. He said he had nowhere to go, but I expect he's up to some mischief or other.'

'Rather hard upon him, wasn't it,' said the other, 'if you had nothing more to say against him than that? However, he has gone on my beat now, so I'll look after him if I come across him.'

So saying, John Davis turned away and slowly retraced his steps. The momentary sight he had had of Stephen's face showed trouble of some sort, and to trouble, in spite of his official severity, John's kindly heart always responded. Many a trouble had been lightened, many a quarrel healed, by his honest counsel; and many a crime had he prevented by his friendly though stern warning.

'I don't see,' he was wont to say to his wife, 'why I shouldn't try to keep people out of trouble if I can, even if I have to be hard on some of them. I don't say but what I haven't much pity for a good many of them; but I'm often sorry for other poor folk, and if I can give any of them a bit of help or a word of warning I'm glad enough to do it.' So as burly

John paced down the street, he looked about to see what had become of the poor lad who, as he mentally observed, had been bullied by his mate.

He was not long in discovering him. Stephen had hurried on for a short distance, alarmed by the policeman's threat, and then, tired and exhausted with his weary wandering, he threw himself down in a dark doorway, trusting to the darkness to hide him. So absorbed was he with his own misery, that he did not hear John's footsteps or notice that he had paused close to him.

'Poor laddie!' muttered John; and then, laying his hand on Stephen's shoulder, he continued aloud, 'Come, my lad, what's the matter?'

Stephen started to his feet with a despairing cry, too terrified to hear a word.

'I've not done anything—indeed I haven't!' he exclaimed, excitedly. 'Oh, don't, don't! Let me go!' and he would have rushed off again had not Davis seized his arm.

For a minute or two he struggled violently to escape, but, as John's practised eye discerned, it was in sheer fright and not with any intention of resist-



“Come ! my lad, what’s the matter ?”

ing, and so, after holding him till he became capable of hearing what was said, he released him, and said, quietly, 'Why, I'm not going to hurt you, lad; sit down for a minute, and then tell me what's the matter.'

Somewhat reassured, Stephen sat down on the steps and leant against the wall, while Davis stood in front of him, looking up and down the street to see that all was right, and every now and then casting a compassionate glance behind him.

'Now, lad,' he said, at last, 'why are you wandering about here? What has gone wrong with you? You needn't be afraid to tell me; I shan't get you into trouble if I can help it.'

'I couldn't get any work yesterday,' said Stephen; 'I tried hard enough to get a job, but I only got threepence, and I had to get some bread with that, so I didn't know what to do to-day. I only came here yesterday morning——'

'Where did you come from?' asked the policeman; 'and what brought you here?'

'I've been tramping about for some days—weeks,' hesitated Stephen, 'and I thought I might get some-

thing to do here. I should have starved outright to-day if it had not been for a young gentleman, and perhaps he'll get me some work to-morrow if—if you'll let me stay here till morning.'

'No, that won't do,' said Davis, noticing how the lad shivered with cold; 'you know I cannot allow it. The best thing will be for me to take you to the station. There you will be in shelter, at least, and——'

'Oh, don't; please don't do that,' cried Stephen, in a tone of despair. 'Please let me stay here;' and, hiding his face in his hands, he murmured something, of which 'couldn't bear it' was all John could catch.

The policeman looked puzzled. He believed the lad's story; he was accustomed to read faces, and, kind-hearted as he was, there were very few who had succeeded in deceiving him; but he could not quite make out why the lad was so terrified. 'Stand up and let me look at you, lad,' he said, in a tone that showed he meant to be obeyed—unfastening the lantern he carried, and holding it so that the light fell full on the crouching figure. Stephen rose

obediently, and looked in the other's face for a minute, dropping his eyes and turning away as he met the searching look fixed on him.

'Ah! I thought as much, poor fellow,' muttered John, as he shut up his lantern and returned it to its place in his belt. 'Now, listen to me,' he went on; 'you must come with me to the other end of my beat, and I'll hand you over to my mate, and he'll find a place for you. No, not at the station,' as the other gave a start of dismay. 'I think you've been telling me the truth, so I'll send you to my own house, and you shall sit by the fire till morning.'

Stephen could scarcely believe he heard right, and tried to express his thanks as he stumbled along, hardly able to keep up with Davis, and glad to lean against the wall when they reached the end of the beat. In a few minutes the expected mate appeared, and after a few words to him, Davis called Stephen. 'Now, you go with Wilson, and he'll look after you. I shall see you again in the morning; don't go away till I come.'

'No, sir; thank you,' returned Stephen, and he turned to follow his new conductor, wondering much at his good luck.

CHAPTER II.

JOHN DAVIS, POLICEMAN.

‘COME along,’ said Wilson, as Davis turned back and disappeared in the darkness, ‘Come along, and I’ll see you safely housed. You don’t look fit to be out here. Look sharp, and we will soon get there; and you’ll find yourself in good hands, I can tell you.’

Stephen was too tired to make any reply, and they walked on in silence till they reached a pleasant little house standing a few yards back from the street where Wilson stopped. ‘Here we are,’ he said, ‘and Mrs. Davis is still up.’

He knocked at the door, and immediately the window was opened. ‘What is it, Wilson?’ inquired Mrs. Davis, not at all taken aback by such a late summons.

‘Come down, Mrs. Davis, will you?’ was the reply; ‘I mustn’t stay a minute.’

Mrs. Davis disappeared, and in another minute the door was opened by a pleasant-looking woman. A glance at her kind, cheerful face was enough to prove that John was right when he said that 'no man ever had a better wife than his missus.' Wilson hastily delivered her husband's message, and, wishing her 'Good night,' hurried off.

'Come in, my lad; come in,' said Mrs. Davis; and as Stephen did so, she shut the door and led the way into the kitchen. 'Why, how you are shivering; you are almost perished with cold. Sit down, and I'll poke up the fire, and you'll soon get warm.'

Stephen sat down, and stretched out his numbed hands to the cheerful blaze, while Mrs. Davis bustled about warming some coffee and making preparations for her unexpected guest by pulling a large, old-fashioned sofa nearer to the fire. Stephen was so worn out that he could hardly keep awake to drink the coffee; and no sooner did he lie down than he was sound asleep.

'Poor boy! Where did John pick him up, I wonder?' she thought, as she stood looking at him for a minute or two. 'I never saw such a man for

finding out people that are in trouble, and he doesn't care what he does for them. I don't believe he thinks anything of the trouble he takes himself.'

And without a thought about how well she was following the example her John set her, Mrs. Davis went off to bed.

The next morning when Davis entered his kitchen, quite ready after his night's work for his morning meal, he found his wife, as usual, busy preparing it, while his acquaintance of the previous night was still lying in a heavy sleep on the sofa. After returning his wife's cheerful greeting, John went to the sleeper and stood for some minutes looking at him.

'It's not a bad face. There's not much harm in the lad, I'm sure,' he said, at last. 'I wonder what took him a step in the wrong direction, and whether it will be possible to give him a pull back into the right road?'

'If anybody can, *you* will, John,' said his wife, proudly. 'But what makes you think he has gone wrong? Wilson said he was not doing anything last night; only tired out and homeless. Poor fellow! and he looks quite a boy, too. I dare say

he will tell you all about it presently, and then you can put him to rights again.

Good Mrs. Davis was firmly convinced that every one would trust their troubles to her John, and she did not doubt his power any more than his willingness to help them. In all the years of her married life she had poured all her troubles, great and small, into John's ear, and never had he failed to 'put her to rights again,' as she expressed it, and so she was convinced he would do for other people. Her husband smiled at her decided tone, and was about to reply, when Stephen, roused by their voices, opened his eyes and looked round in wonder, as if unable to make out where he was. He started as he saw the tall figure towering over him, but he was encouraged by John's hearty voice. 'Well, my lad, had a good rest? Better than lying on the stones all night, isn't it?'

'Yes, sir, thank you,' sitting up and looking from John to his wife, as if still half asleep or bewildered.

'Leave him to himself a bit,' whispered John to his wife, who busied herself with completing her breakfast operations, and when it was ready John seated himself.

‘Come along, lad; I’m sure you must want some breakfast.’

Stephen said nothing, but looked at his clothes and then at his hands.

‘Oh! go along and get a wash then,’ said Davis, good-humouredly. ‘That’s easily put right, at all events.’

Stephen followed Mrs. Davis out of the room, and presently she bustled back again to look after her cooking.

‘He’s a strange lad, John,’ she remarked. ‘He hasn’t said a word, and he starts when he’s spoken to, and doesn’t seem to know what to do.’

‘He’ll be all right presently,’ returned her husband, ‘He’s a bit frightened, that all.’

‘*Frightened!* What at?’

‘At *me* chiefly!’ said John, laughing. ‘I suspect he has known what it is to get rather roughly treated, and he’s not quite sure what I’m going to do with him. He will come round when he has had something to eat and finds that I’m not very surly. Ah! here he comes.’

The door was pushed slowly open, and Stephen

made his appearance. He was a tall lad with what would have been a pleasant face had it not been spoiled by a downcast expression which gave him the appearance of being afraid to look at any one. He was miserably clad, and was thin and evidently half-starved, but nevertheless he looked as if, under better conditions, he would have been a bright, intelligent lad.

Davis looked him over keenly, and then, apparently satisfied with the correctness of his previous opinion, he said, 'Sit down, lad, and have some breakfast;' and as Stephen came hesitatingly to the table, he put a plate of Mrs. Davis's excellent bacon in front of him, and told him to make haste and dispose of it, after which he took no more notice of his silent guest, though hospitable Mrs. Davis watched with pleasure his evident enjoyment of her good food.

'Well,' said John, at length, when he saw that Stephen had finished his meal, 'you haven't told me your name yet.'

The lad hesitated, coloured, and then said in a low tone, with evident effort, 'Stephen Elliot, sir!'

'And what are you going to do with yourself?'

asked Davis, taking no notice of his manner, though he made a mental note of the fact that the boy had resisted the temptation to give a false name, and set that down to his credit.

‘I—I don’t know,’ stammered Stephen; ‘the young gentleman said I was to go to him this morning, but I thought—I thought you——’

‘You thought you were in a scrape, eh? Well, though you were so desperately afraid of me last night, I haven’t treated you very badly yet, have I?—not given you quite prison fare!’

Stephen glanced furtively at Davis, and finding he was watching him, hastily turned away his face; but after a moment’s pause he looked up again, and said in a more open manner than he had spoken before, and in quite a different tone, ‘You have been very good to me, sir, and I can’t thank you enough. If only I get the chance, I’ll try and get on now, and not——’ he stopped abruptly and looked very uncomfortable.

Davis nodded. ‘That’s right, lad,’ he said, kindly. ‘Now who was this young gentleman; I suppose he gave you his name?’

‘He told me I was to ask for Yorke’s factory, and to go to his house and send in this’—producing a scrap of paper—‘and he would ask his father to give me a job.’

‘Ah! that’s young Mr. Sidney,’ returned Davis, ‘I know him well; you’re not the first by many that he has done a kindness to!’

‘No, that’s true enough,’ interposed Mrs. Davis, pausing in the act of carrying off her plates; ‘he’s as like his father as ever he can be, and *he* is as kind a gentleman as ever lived. I ought to know, that’s certain, seeing how many years I lived with them. Mr. Sidney is always trying to do a good turn to somebody or other!’

‘And gets taken in pretty often,’ growled her husband, shrugging his broad shoulders.

‘The more shame for them that take him in,’ retorted Mrs. Davis, indignantly. ‘Look at that young rascal Brown, after all the trouble Mr. Sidney took with him, no sooner did he get a good place than he must needs drink and fight, till he got into gaol. I hope,’ turning to Stephen, ‘that if you do get work there you will be behave yourself and not vex Mr.

Sidney, for he's terribly put out when any of his friends go wrong.'

'I'll try,' said Stephen, in a low tone; 'I'll not forget how kind he was yesterday.'

'Oh, come! some of them do turn out well,' said Davis, cheerfully, 'and I don't see why Elliot shouldn't. As for that scamp Brown, I told Mr. Sidney he would come to no good, but he wouldn't listen to me. But there's young Jackson getting on like a house on fire, and Mr. Sidney as pleased as anything about it. Now time is getting on, Elliot, and you had better be going. The factory is not far off, and I'll come to the corner of the street and put you in the way.'

Stephen, after thanking Mrs. Davis, followed him to the door, but no sooner were they outside than Davis stopped. 'Elliot,' he said, putting his hand on Stephen's shoulder, 'you must tell Mr. Yorke the truth!'

'Oh! I can't, I can't!' exclaimed Stephen, shivering and turning pale; 'if I do, he won't take me on, and what am I to do if no one will employ me? I saw you knew all about it, but don't make me tell him, you don't know how hard it is.'

‘Yes, I think I know very well,’ said Davis, kindly; ‘but believe me, lad, it’s the right thing to do, and the wisest thing, too, in the long run. You would always be afraid it might come out, and if it did, Mr. Yorke and Mr. Sidney would feel you had been deceiving them, and never trust you again.’

‘They won’t give me a chance if I tell them.’

‘I think they will, and think the better of you for speaking out. It won’t happen again, lad?’

‘No!’ was Stephen’s only reply as they walked on.

‘Then be a brave fellow and get it over. You were meant for better things than this,’ touching Stephen’s ragged coat; ‘and if I were you, I’d fight hard to get up in the world. This is not the life you have been used to, I can see. What work have you been doing?’

‘I was in an office, and meant to have got on, and then—then, I know I deserved it, but they really were very hard on me. I wish you had been there,’ turning suddenly to his companion.

In spite of himself, Davis could not help laughing. ‘You think I should have been softer-hearted, do you? Don’t be too sure of that. I have a disagree-

able side, too, so take care you don't give me any reason to show it to you. There you are; turn to the right at the bottom of the street and you'll see the factory in front of you, and Mr. Yorke's house is just to the left of it, through some large green gates. Now take my advice and have it all out.'

'Yes, sir, I *will* do it; I know you're right, but——'

'Go along with you, and don't stop to think about it,' interrupted Davis; 'and look here, come back to me if you get work, and I'll find you a decent place to lodge at. You can tell Mr. Yorke, if you like, that I'll keep an eye on you.'

Oddly enough, the very same words that had nearly scared Stephen out of his senses the night before, yet they seemed quite different now. Then they had been a terrible threat to him, now they sounded like a cheering and friendly encouragement; so much depends on the way in which words are spoken, and the person who speaks them.

Stephen, as he made his way to the factory, wondered at the kindness he had received from one whom he had fully expected to be "down on him," and made up his mind that if he could only get work

he would stick to it, no matter how hard it was, though he felt that it was very doubtful whether he had any chance in such a condition as he was then.

And good-natured John Davis, having watched him down the street, sauntered slowly home, thinking about the lad to whom he had given a helping hand. 'A better sort of lad than most of them,' was the conclusion of his thoughts; 'comes of a decent family I should think, and got led wrong by some good-for-nothing fellow. He may get along now if he likes, and I believe he will. Anyhow, it's just as easy to give him a friendly word and try to push him up as it is to shake him roughly and drag him down.'

With which kindly thought John turned into his house and betook himself to rest.

CHAPTER III.

HEPBURN OF HEPBURN HALL.

‘ You will, father, won’t you? You really might do it for once.’

‘ My dear Sidney, for once! My memory may not be very good, but I have a faint recollection of one or two previous requests of this kind. It seems to me you are always picking up some young scamp or other. No wonder Walter looks askance at us. Oh, why isn’t Walter my boy? Why am I plagued with a son who is always bothering about other people instead of keeping himself to himself in a proper and respectable manner.’

‘ I can’t think why,’ was the saucy rejoinder; ‘ could it be, do you think, father, the force of your own bad example.’

‘ You young rascal,’ returned Mr. Yorke, laughing. ‘ But do you really think it is any use trying this lad? Very few of them will take the trouble to get on, even if they do get a helping hand.’

‘Oh, yes, father, very often they do. Look how Jackson is getting on; you said yourself he had done capitally and deserved to rise in the world.’

‘Yes, he has certainly; but what about Brown, and—well never mind, Sidney,’ seeing his son’s face clouding over, ‘you cannot expect to succeed always, and it is well worth trying if you can help one or two, so we will see what we can do for this new friend if he comes, and hope for the best.’

‘He will be sure to come, I know,’ said Sidney. ‘Thank you very much father; I’m sure he will turn out well, he hadn’t at all a bad face. But father,’ hesitatingly, ‘you will speak to Richardson about him, won’t you?’

‘Your courage is not equal to that, eh? Now I think it would be a real test of friendship if you were to speak to him yourself, and not fight shy of it because you don’t care to hear his remarks about Mr. Sidney’s pets!’

Sidney coloured. ‘Of course, I will speak to him. I ought not to mind, only I’m afraid of losing my temper’—in a low tone.

His father smiled; he knew his son too well to be

afraid of that, though all he said was, 'We won't risk it then. I'll undertake him. You know, Sidney, Richardson is a very good fellow, and it is his duty to see that the work is properly done. You ought not to dislike him because he won't let the lads shirk their work or be insolent to him, as Brown was.'

'No, of course not,' said Sidney; 'he was quite right there. It isn't that, only he always seems rather pleased than otherwise if he catches one of the lads tripping, especially if——'

'It is one of your pets! No, no, Sidney, I don't think that. Richardson is strictly just, though he might be a little more lenient; but you may depend upon it, if your new friend shows that he is really anxious to get up the ladder, Richardson is not the man to push him down again.'

'Only he won't hold out a finger to help him up!'

'You are incorrigible!' said his father, laughing; 'everyone won't be bothered with your wishes as I am. I really wish——'

'You had Walter for a son!'

'Yes, indeed;' and Mr. Yorke put his hand on Sidney's shoulder with a look of affection that

belied his words; 'his requests are limited to one person, and that saves trouble: "Uncle Henry, I want—so sorry to trouble you, Uncle Henry, but could you let me have a little money? I am out of cigars!" Cigars: of course, but ragged lads—faugh!'

'You are too bad, father,' laughed Sidney. 'Walter is a good-enough fellow at the bottom, if only he didn't think himself——'

'So superior,' said Mr. Yorke, shrugging his shoulders; 'that's just it. You see, he always bears in mind that he is Hepburn of Hepburn Hall and you—Yorke of Yorke's Factory.'

'And proud to be so!'

'That's right; make the best of a bad business.'

'Which it is not, sir! On the contrary, it is the most thriving business in the town. The well-known establishment of Mr. Henry Yorke is always to be relied upon for thoroughly good work, and I am proud to say we turn out more and better blankets ——'

'Hush, hush!' interposed Mr. Yorke, with exaggerated alarm, 'here comes Hepburn of Hepburn

Hall. Let me beg you to drop the subject, and if you could only look as if you had never heard of a blanket—— Good morning, Walter; Sidney and I were just beginning to want our breakfast.'

'Good morning, uncle,' returned young Hepburn; 'I hope I have not kept you waiting.'

'No, it's only just time. Come along, Sidney,' and he led the way into an adjoining room.

Mrs. Yorke, a pleasant-looking lady, was busy with breakfast arrangement, and a merry-looking girl about three years younger than Sidney was superintending the education of a Skye terrier, who looked like a shaggy mat with a black nose at one end.

'I thought you were never coming!' she exclaimed, by way of greeting. 'I've been teaching Shag for ever so long, and I want to show him off. Now, Shag, no well-brought-up dog would think of eating this piece of bread without leave from the greatest person in the kingdom.'

Shag sat up, dangled his paws, and mutely protested that he *was* a well-brought-up dog.'

'The Prime Minister?' Shag repudiated the suggestion with scorn.

‘The Prince of Wales?’ Shag whined, but doubted the Prince of Wales.

‘The King?’ Shag promptly pounced on the coveted morsel and snapped it up.

‘There!’ said Maud, triumphantly; ‘and he can die when he is told, and knows his right hand from his left.’

‘His education is progressing, certainly,’ said Mr. Yorke, laughing. ‘But I advise you not to give him too many rewards; he is getting fat.’

‘It’s only his hair,’ said Maud. ‘There, Shag, out you go;’ and opening the low window she dismissed her pet and sat down to breakfast.

‘I can’t think how you can take so much trouble with the little dog,’ remarked her cousin, languidly. ‘I should get some one else to teach him if I were you.’

‘Trouble?’ returned Maud. ‘I don’t see any trouble in it, and I want him to be a learned dog. Why don’t you teach Rufus to fetch and carry? He is getting nearly as lazy as——’ his master, she was going to say, but a quick glance from her mother made her pause abruptly.

‘He really does want a little exercise,’ said Sidney. ‘Let us go for a long walk this morning and give him a run. I want to go over to Repton to see Harry Ford; do come with me.’

‘To Repton?’ exclaimed Walter. ‘Why, it miles and miles! Besides, what’s the use of bothering oneself to walk? Why not have the dogcart and drive?’

‘It’s only three miles,’ said Sidney, ‘and you know we can’t drive to-day; Smith is not fit to go out yet.’

‘What a nuisance the fellow is,’ grumbled Walter. ‘What is the use of a man who can’t do his work! I particularly want to go over and see Ffoulkes to-day, and he is off to-morrow, so it’s my last chance. But I don’t see why we shouldn’t go without Smith. It’s absurd to suppose I can’t manage Harkaway.’

‘My dear Walter,’ said Mrs. Yorke, in an undertone, glancing at her husband, who was apparently absorbed in his paper, ‘you know your uncle said you were not to go without Smith. Harkaway is such a very spirited horse, and the last time you drove you know what happened.’

Walter looked very cross, and muttered, 'Nothing to signify.'

'Nothing to signify!' burst out Maud. 'You don't care what you hurt, I believe! You are a perfect Nero!'

'My dear Maud,' remarked her father, putting down his paper, 'what did happen that excites you so much? Walter has not been crushing anyone under the wheels of his chariot, surely?'

'Not exactly,' said Maud; 'but he did drive over a dog, and——'

'Was it hurt much, Walter?' inquired her father.

'I don't know,' replied Walter, carelessly. 'It was only a little mongrel; it couldn't have been of much value to anyone.'

'Do you really mean you didn't take the trouble to see?' asked Mr. Yorke, sharply.

'Such a fuss about nothing,' Walter muttered. 'There are plenty of dogs.'

'We couldn't pull up Harkaway for some distance,' Sidney said quickly.

'What, were you there? You surely don't mean that *you* left the poor little beast in the road without knowing whether it was dying in pain or not?'

‘Of course he didn’t!’ the impetuous Maud burst out. ‘You ought to know better than that, father. Sidney went back, and it belonged to a little boy who didn’t know what to do with it, so Sidney carried the poor little thing all the way to Morton, and its leg was broken, but Morton set it, and he says it will soon be as well as ever.’

‘Ah!’ said Mr. Yorke, in a tone that made Sidney’s face flush with pleasure. ‘Now, Walter, you are not to drive Harkaway again. I will not run the risk of your meeting with an accident either to yourself or other people; so you must wait till Smith is well enough to go out with you. Do you hear?’

‘Yes, uncle,’ muttered Walter, sulkily. ‘But if Smith is going to be laid up like this, I do wish——’

‘That I would dismiss him and get you another groom, eh? That’s a pretty way to treat a man who has served you as well as Smith has.’

‘Walter did not mean to be unkind to Smith, I am sure,’ said Mrs. Yorke, gently. ‘Did you, Walter?’

But Walter declined to speak, and only looked very cross.

‘A lad named Elliot has brought this paper, sir,’

said the servant at that moment, 'and he says he was told to come up this morning.'

'Oh, I am so glad!' exclaimed Sidney, jumping up. 'May I go to him, mother?'

'No, no; finish your breakfast first,' said his father. 'There's no hurry; he won't run away. Saunders, take the lad into my room and ask him if he has had any breakfast; if not, see that he has some. That's right, is it not, Sid?'

'Quite right, thank you, father,' said Sidney, laughing. 'I cannot imagine how it is you always know what one is thinking about.'

'What a terribly unpleasant idea! Don't you think so, Walter? If I were to guess what *you* were thinking of, I should say—never mind,' seeing that Walter looked really uncomfortable; 'if I do guess, I'll keep it a secret. And look here, my boy; I don't want you to break your neck, and I cannot send away a trustworthy man like Smith. But if you like to send Harkaway out to Hepburn Hall, you shall have a steadier horse here till Smith gets about again. Parker told me yesterday he had a very good chestnut, and if you want to go out to-day, you can ask

him if he will go with you and let you try it. I almost think it would be better to sell Harkaway,' he continued, gathering up his letters as he spoke; 'he is not at all a safe horse for you, though I am not "so absurd as to suppose" that you are not a first-rate whip. At all events, you can drive Parker's to-day and see how you like it. Will that suit you?' laying his hand on his nephew's shoulder as he passed him.

'Yes, thank you, uncle,' replied Walter, looking up; and then colouring, he added, in an undertone, 'I didn't mean—I wasn't thinking——'

'What a brute of an uncle you had got,' interrupted Mr. Yorke, laughing in a good-humoured way. 'Well, don't think worse of me than you can help. Now, Sidney, if you are ready, let us go and see after this new friend of yours.'

CHAPTER IV.

YORKE OF YORKE'S FACTORY.

'WONDERS will never cease,' remarked Mr. Yorke, as with his hand passed through his son's arm he crossed the hall. 'That is the first time Walter has condescended to make the slightest apology to me for all his impertinent speeches and sulky looks.'

'He doesn't mean half he says,' said Sidney, eagerly; 'I believe he tries to make you think as badly as possible of him. He is all right at the bottom, only he seems to think it fine to——'

'Give himself airs with me,' said Mr. Yorke, finishing the sentence. 'I dare say you are right, Sidney; I cannot believe his father's son could be so unfeeling and cruel as he seems to be. Your uncle was as kind-hearted a man as ever lived, and what he would say to his son, I cannot think. He was a kind, good friend to me, and for his sake I must do the best I can for Walter; but I confess he irritates me with his conceited airs and his indifference to everyone but himself.'

‘He is not as bad as he makes himself out,’ said Sidney. ‘About the dog, father; it was really an accident. It ran out into the road suddenly, and Harkaway shied and was over it before we could stop him, and then he bolted and we couldn’t pull him up. Walter declared it served the dog right, and he pretends he doesn’t know whether it is alive or dead; but all the same I know he went down to Morton yesterday and saw it, for Morton told me “the young gent laughed and said it was the ugliest little brute he had ever seen, but it must be patched up somehow, for he didn’t want to be haunted all his life by a three-legged mongrel,” and he recommended Morton to give it beef-tea and cod-liver oil.’

‘I hope his prescriptions will be efficacious. I am very glad that he did take some trouble about it, though why he should be so bent on provoking me, I cannot think.’

Sidney was going to speak, but checked himself, feeling that it was useless to attempt any excuse for his cousin’s frequent defiance of his uncle’s wishes, and his rude, insolent manner. He often wondered at his father’s forbearance, little thinking that his

own constant efforts to keep the peace had not escaped notice, and that Mr. Yorke often kept back a sharp rebuke that his son might have the satisfaction of feeling that he had been successful. Nor did he guess with what interest and pleasure his father was watching the steady influence which he was gaining over his cousin, and how earnestly he was hoping that his careful training of his own son might be a benefit to the son of his dear friend and benefactor.

Up to the last year Walter had been practically his own master. His father was the owner of a large estate some three miles from Beecham, and had died when he was about six years old, leaving him to the guardianship of his mother and of his brother-in-law, Mr. Yorke, who had been his most intimate friend, and for whom he had the warmest esteem. Unfortunately this feeling was not shared by his wife, and she was extremely indignant that her son should be in any degree under the control of one whom she had always looked down upon as being the owner of the largest manufactory in Beecham, ignoring the fact that Mr. Yorke was a gentleman by birth and education, and in every way her husband's equal.

Although she was obliged to consult him on matters of business, she showed her dislike openly, and did her best to prejudice Walter against him as he grew older, until Mr. Yorke often declared that he would wash his hands of it and let Mrs. Hepburn ruin the boy her own way. For his old friend's sake, however, he still tried to exert his authority to save his son, and when Walter was about seventeen, the sudden death of his mother, who had lived abroad for some years, left him entirely under the control of his much-disliked uncle.

As he had been brought up to consider himself the most important person in the house, and allowed to have his own way in everything, Walter felt acutely the change to his uncle's house, and he set himself obstinately to resist his authority whenever he dared. As he never had given the slightest thought to the happiness of those round him, he looked with scorn on the interest which his uncle and cousin took in the well-doing of the numerous workmen in the manufactory. With a view to show his superiority he indulged in such constant sneers, that it must be confessed Maud was not far wrong when she re-

marked 'that Cousin Walter was a most detestable creature.' Kind-hearted Mrs. Yorke, however, could not help hoping for better things, and Sidney maintained that at the bottom Walter was not such a bad fellow, and, in spite of differences now and then, the two were very good friends.

Insensibly, too, Walter became influenced by his surroundings, and though he still openly grumbled at his uncle's restrictions, in spite of himself he began to feel very differently towards him. Mr. Yorke would have been greatly surprised had he known what was really the case, though Walter would hardly have owned, even to himself, that the person for whom he felt the greatest respect, and whose opinion he most valued, was the uncle he had been taught to despise and dislike. Lately, Mr. Yorke had fancied that, though outwardly as much at variance with him as ever, his nephew was now and then a little ashamed of his rude speeches, and would have said so had not pride kept him back, and he was thinking more favourably of Walter than usual as he followed Sidney into the room where Stephen Elliot was awaiting his fate.

‘I’m so glad you have come,’ began Sidney, and poor Stephen looked greatly relieved at the sight of his friendly face. ‘It is all right; father will find you something to do.’

‘Wait a bit, Sidney,’ interposed his father, ‘we must see first what he has to say for himself. How came you to be in such bad case yesterday? You don’t look as if you ought to be wandering about in this plight.’

‘I can’t get any work to do, sir,’ said Stephen, in a low voice.

‘You are not likely to get any if you go about in this way. Should not you have had a better chance in your own neighbourhood?’

‘No, sir.’

‘Have you no home or friends?’

‘No sir.’

‘Where did you come from then?’

Stephen made no reply.

‘What have you been doing? Do you know anything about our kind of work?’

‘No, sir; but I will learn, indeed I will, if you will only try me.’

‘Where did you sleep last night? You told Mr. Sidney you had no money to get a bed or food.’

‘No, sir; I should have starved if I hadn’t met him, and then Mr. Davis, the policeman, sent me to his house, and he said I was to tell you——’

‘Well?’ said Mr. Yorke, as Stephen hesitated.

‘He said I was to tell you, he would—keep an eye on me.’

‘Oh!’ said Mr. Yorke, smiling. ‘Did Davis know anything of you before?’

‘No, sir.’

‘Then what made him say that? Come, my lad,’ as Stephen said nothing, ‘I am willing enough to give you a helping hand, but you must tell me what has brought you into this state. Have you run away from your parents—is that it?’

‘I—I came—I have been—’ and then poor Stephen stood nervously twisting his hat round in his hands, quite unable to get any further. If he had looked up and seen the keen eyes fixed on him he would have known that his confession was needless, and that Mr. Yorke knew without any more words what he was struggling to say, but he did **not** venture to raise his head.

‘Suppose you tell Mr. Sidney all about it,’ said Mr. Yorke, after a moment’s silence; ‘and then he can tell me if he still wishes to help you. Whatever it is, Elliot, it is better to be open about it than to have it always hanging over you. Sidney, I’ll wait ten minutes in my study, and then I must be off. Poor lad, it is rather a hard trial,’ he thought, as he closed the door. ‘I hope Sidney will be judicious and not make too little of it for fear of being thought unkind and hard-hearted;’ and Mr. Yorke sat down to his desk and became busy with his letters.

‘Well,’ he said, when Sidney came in, ‘what says the lad? Has he told you his history and confided his troubles to you?’

‘Yes,’ said Sidney slowly; ‘I am very sorry for him, but he says he is afraid you will not employ him if you know.’

‘You would rather not tell me, you mean?’

‘Of course I shall tell you, father—you ought to know; but he is really very sorry now, and——’

‘My dear Sidney,’ said his father, half-laughing, ‘it is nearly as difficult for you to get to the point as for the unfortunate lad himself. Perhaps it will be

a relief to your mind to know that you need not explain any further. That's what it is, eh?' and writing one word on a piece of paper, he threw it across the table to his son.

'Yes,' replied Sidney, 'but I cannot think how you knew; I know you will be kind to him if I tell you about him.'

'Poor lad!' said Mr. Yorke, when Sidney had finished his story. 'You think he is really ashamed of himself, and you still want to help him?'

'Yes, indeed, I do. I am sure he will do well now, if you will give him a chance.'

'Very well then. Of course, one cannot be certain, but unless I am a bad judge of character, you will not be disappointed this time.'

'Oh, I'm so glad!' exclaimed Sidney; 'you are always right, father. Let me fetch him.'

'I can see you are sorry now,' said Mr. Yorke, kindly, seeing Stephen's downcast face as he appeared in answer to Sidney's call. 'If I give you a chance of making a fresh start, will you do your best to get back your character, and be trustworthy and honest for the future?'

‘Yes, indeed I will, sir!’

‘Very well, you shall have a chance; but mind, it depends on you to show us that you mean what you say, and I hope we shall see you getting on in the world. You can come up to the office in the morning, and Mr. Richardson, the foreman, will set you on. Mr. Sidney will tell you about the work, and he will help you if you are in any difficulty;’ and nodding in reply to Stephen’s stammering thanks, Mr. Yorke hurried off.

CHAPTER VI.

HARKAWAY.

‘SIDNEY! Bother the fellow. Sidney, I say!’

‘Well, what is it?’

‘I’ve been waiting for you no end of a time. What on earth have you been doing? Come along and let us go down to Parker and see if we can have a rocking-horse this afternoon.’

Sidney laughed. ‘Or a donkey! I can’t come just now though; you had better go without me.’

Walter came slowly into the hall where his cousin was talking to Stephen.

‘What are you up to then, and who may that be?’

‘A friend of mine,’ returned Sidney.

‘Your *friend* looks rather cold,’ Walter said, raising his eyebrows and looking rather disdainfully at Stephen, but ending his sentence differently from what he intended, at a sharp glance from Sidney, ‘What are you going to do with him?’

‘He is going to work in the factory to-morrow,’

said Sidney, following his cousin into the room, where he threw himself into an armchair by the fire.

‘Well, surely you can send him off now. I can’t, for the life of me, think why you want to bother about a fellow like that. His clothes are in rags.’

‘You choose your friends by their clothes, then,’ remarked Sidney, rather scornfully; ‘but as for that, I’m sure I wish he had a warmer jacket; it’s horribly cold to-day.’

‘Get him one,’ said Walter, carelessly.

‘I would if I could,’ said Sidney, looking into his purse somewhat ruefully, ‘but unluckily I am——’

‘Bankrupt,’ suggested Walter, eyeing him with an expression of mingled amusement and wonder. ‘I dare say he is used to being cold, so it doesn’t much matter. Why not give him half your own coat, like that fellow you were dinning into my ears the other day—Saint somebody or other. Rather you than I, though, such a day as this. Just give me that book and shut the door, there’s a good fellow.’

‘I believe you think of no one but yourself,’ said Sidney, indignantly; ‘as long as you are comfortable, you don’t care two straws whether other people are starving or not.’

‘Why should I?’ returned Walter, coolly; ‘that is not in my line you know. “Take care of number one, and number two will take care of himself,” that’s my motto.’

‘I wonder you are not ashamed to own it!’ and Sidney marched out of the room, too angry to see that Walter was really half in fun.

‘Sidney!’ he called after him, but Sidney paid no attention.

‘Oh, dear! oh, dear! I shall have to go after him, I suppose.’ But on reaching the hall, he found only Elliot there.

‘Hi! you—what’s your name?—come here a minute,’ and when Stephen approached he went on, ‘It strikes me you would be better for a warmer coat. Shouldn’t like to shiver about in a thing like that myself. Here, cut away now, and get a new one. What? Oh, all right, never mind about the thanks; that is all understood, you know,’ and he shut the door and went back to the fire, leaving the astonished Stephen gazing at the bright coin he had dropped into his hand.

‘Walter, how awfully good of you!’ exclaimed

Sidney a moment later rushing headlong into the room. 'Did you really mean it?'

'Mean what?' grumbled Walter. 'Oh, I remember, "Take care of number one, and number two will take care of himself." Yes, of course I mean it. Can't imagine, though, why you should make a fellow jump nearly out of his skin about it. I thought you didn't approve of the sentiment either.'

'What an ass you are!' laughed Sidney; 'Elliot can hardly believe it is true, and I didn't——'

'Expect it of me,' Walter interrupted, rather drily, 'I am quite aware, my good cousin, that you would not expect it of me.'

'Nonsense, old fellow, don't be absurd,' said Sidney, rather vexed at his cousin's tone; 'I was going to say I didn't want such a lot as that. It won't take all that for a coat!'

'Well, I suppose you can spend the rest, somehow.'

'Of course, and thanks very much.'

'Oh, rubbish; it was entirely to please'—you, he was going to say, but substituted 'myself; for it seems as if nothing else would make you get rid of

the fellow and shut the door, and my motto is——'

'Bother your motto,' said Sidney, laughing; 'take that,' and seizing a cushion, he hurled it at his cousin's head and disappeared, opening the door again to say that he would be at Parker's in half an hour if Walter would meet him there.

'What about the horse, Walter?' inquired Mr. Yorke, when the party were dispersing after lunch; 'are you going to try it to-day?'

'No,' said Walter, shortly.

'We cannot have it to-day,' said Sidney; 'Parker said he was very sorry, but he was obliged to use it this afternoon, but we can have it to-morrow.'

'That will do as well, I suppose, won't it? I forgot, though,' seeing his nephew's cloudy face, 'you wanted to see young Ffoulkes, didn't you? Are you sure he is off to-morrow?'

'Yes,' was all Walter vouchsafed, and he left the room, followed immediately by Sidney.

A few minutes later, as Mr. Yorke crossed the hall, he became aware that a lively discussion was going on between his son and his nephew. 'It's all very fine to say that,' he heard the latter say, angrily,

‘but if it were one of your precious pets, you wouldn’t like him to go off for years without seeing him, and all because of this absurd nonsense. I tell you I won’t——’ An angry inaudible mutter ended the sentence as Mr. Yorke appeared.

At the sight of his son’s face Mr. Yorke paused, and after a moment’s consideration retraced his steps.

‘Walter,’ he said, ignoring his nephew’s black looks, ‘I find I must get over to Fordham this afternoon to see Mr. Harper, and your aunt wants the carriage. I don’t wish to upset her arrangements; what do you say to driving me over? About half an hour will settle my business, and then we can come round by “The Firs,” and you can see your friend Ffoulkes. I shall be glad of the chance of having a chat with his father.’

‘Oh! that will be first-rate,’ exclaimed Sidney, with such a look of relief that his father could scarcely suppress a smile; ‘that will just do, won’t it, Walter?’

‘What are we to drive?’ Walter muttered, ungraciously.

‘Harkaway, if he won’t be too lively,’ said Mr.

Yorke; 'I will be ready in about an hour if you will order the dog-cart;' and taking his nephew's consent for granted, he went into his room.

It must be confessed that, when an hour later Mr. Yorke stood at the door watching the restive movements of the high-mettled Harkaway, he regretted a little his good-natured desire to gratify his nephew's wishes, and felt rather dubious of his power of restraining such a fiery steed. But he need have felt no uneasiness. Whatever might be lacking in his qualifications as an obedient ward, and affectionate nephew, or an agreeable guest, there was no doubt that 'Hepburn of Hepburn Hall' was a first-rate whip. So skilfully did he drive the horse Harkaway that his uncle was fain to own to himself that there was some truth in the lad's assertion 'that it was absurd to suppose he could not manage Harkaway.' The exertion, too, seemed to rouse Walter out of his usual indolent manner, and though for the first few miles he maintained, for some reason, a half-sulky, half-ashamed air, and left all the conversation to Sidney, who occupied the back seat, by degrees he shook that off, and Mr. Yorke had never before found him so pleasant a companion.

Harkaway too, much to Sidney's secret relief, seemed at first more inclined to behave himself than usual, and until they left 'The Firs' on their return all went smoothly. But when, after his farewell to his friend, Walter took up the reins, there were signs which, to Sidney's experienced eye, bodied mischief. Whether Harkaway's temper had been tried by the long waiting, or whether he thought that it was time to show off a little, certain it was that even in the avenue he shied and started constantly. When they reached the road he continued to shy at every object that attracted his attention; a heap of stones, an overturned wheelbarrow, an old woman with a white basket, were each in turn the cause of a violent start, and when the sight of a man lying by the side of the road nearly landed them in the opposite ditch, Mr. Yorke began to be a little nervous as to the ultimate result. But Walter betrayed no uneasiness, and though it was evident it taxed his utmost strength and skill, he would no doubt have been able to control the excited animal, had not an unlucky circumstance finally nearly brought on a dire catastrophe.

They were about a mile from Beecham, and had just reached the top of the long ascent that led to the town on that side, when they came full on Harkaway's pet aversion—a traction engine. He stopped short instantly, and begun plunging and rearing viciously, evidently determined not to pass it. Walter was alternately soothing him and urging him on, when a shrill hiss from the engine brought matters to a crisis. Harkaway gave a loud snort, and turned so sharply round as nearly to overturn the dog-cart, and with a bound that tried every strap in the harness, and nearly jerked the reins out of Walter's hand, he bolted back down the hill.

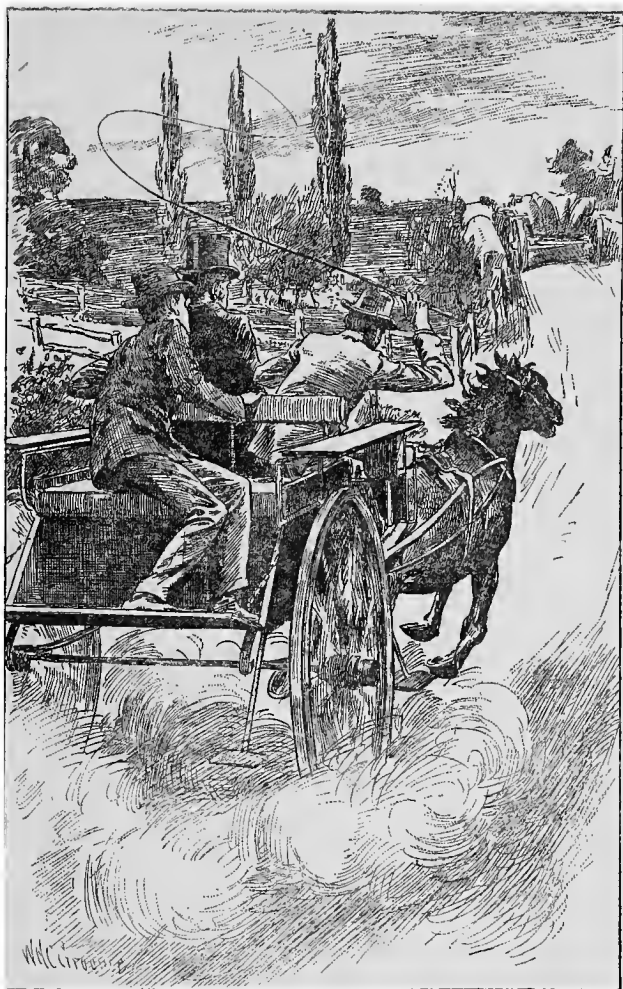
By this time, Mr. Yorke had become so confident in his nephew's skill, that he had little doubt that he would regain control over the horse if they met no obstacle in their headlong career; but to his dismay he remembered that a short time before they had passed a heavily laden wagon slowly lumbering towards the town. Before they were half way down the hill he saw it, and involuntarily uttered an exclamation of horror, while a swift glance at Walter's face showed that he realised to the full their perilous

position. At the bottom of the hill, the road crossed a bridge, barely wide enough at any time for two vehicles to pass, and in the middle of it stood, at this moment, the broad wagon.

To Mr. Yorke and Sidney, who had with difficulty kept his seat, it seemed as if another second would see the dog-cart smashed in pieces against the wagon, or jammed between the wheels and the bridge; but Walter's presence of mind had not deserted him.

Suddenly, with a sharp 'Hold tight, Sidney,' he slackened the reins and seized the whip.

A few yards from the bridge, a lane turned sharp to the left, leading up a steep pitch to a farm, and from thence to another high road. The instant they reached this lane, Walter leant forward as far as he dared and brought his whip down with a sudden cut on the right side of Harkaway's head, at the same time tightening the opposite rein. The horse swerved sharply to the left, and in another instant was galloping up the lane, gradually slackening his pace as the pull became harder. Almost before the others had time to understand what had happened, Walter had checked his speed to a moderate pace, and the danger was over.



, Walter . . . brought his whip down with a sudden cut .
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CHAPTER VI.

EATING HUMBLE PIE.

‘SIDNEY,’ said Mr. Yorke, when he found himself alone that evening with his son, ‘I don’t know what Walter will say, but I cannot let him drive that horse any more.’

‘It is rather risky,’ said Sidney, looking up from his book with a lively recollection of several hair-breadth escapes, nearly as bad as their experience that afternoon. ‘He drives splendidly though, doesn’t he, father?’

‘He does, indeed; if his nerve had failed him for one minute, we should have been smashed to pieces; it is a perfect marvel to me that we escaped. I hope he won’t be very furious at parting with Harkaway, but I cannot allow him to run such a fearful risk again. The strain is far too much for him at his age.’

Sidney said nothing, but he quite agreed. He knew only too well that after one of Harkaway’s

escapades, Walter was in such an irritable state for the rest of the day, that it was a matter of great difficulty to avoid an open quarrel.

Beyond an emphatic 'Well done, Walter!' from Mr. Yorke, when they found themselves in safety, the remainder of the drive had been passed almost in silence, but Mr. Yorke had been observing his nephew all the evening. He had heard his irritable answers whenever he was addressed by Sidney or Maud, and had noticed that, though apparently lounging in his usual indolent way in an easy chair, he evidently could not fix his mind on the book before him, and the slightest noise made him start nervously. At last, when the sudden sharp crack of a log of wood in the fire had made him jump so violently as to drop his book, he got up with an impatient exclamation and left the room, as if much annoyed with himself.

'I wonder where he has gone?' resumed Mr. Yorke; 'I had better have it out with him, I think, and get it over. Ah! here he comes,' and Walter, reappearing at that moment, Mr. Yorke began on the subject immediately.

‘Walter, I really think it would be better to get rid of Harkaway at once and get another horse; I cannot let you drive him again, I wonder you have not met with some accident before now!’

Probably if Mr. Yorke had waited till the next day to discuss the question, Walter would have been more willing to listen to reason, but his nerves had been more upset than his uncle guessed, and he was ready to take offence at the first word.

‘No one could have helped the brute running away to-day,’ he said, sulkily.

‘No, I know that, and very few would have thought of, or done, what you did. I am not throwing any slur on your skill, Walter, but your own sense must tell you that it is, at the best, a very dangerous amusement to drive such a horse as that.’

‘I have often driven it before, and no harm has come of it. It is my own affair if I choose to risk it, and cannot matter to anyone else!’

‘Well, yes it does,’ returned Mr. Yorke; ‘as long as you are with me it is my business to see that you do not run needlessly into danger. Anyhow, I won’t let you risk your life and Sidney’s.’

'Ah! that's the real reason,' interrupted Walter, rudely. 'It's Sidney's safety you are anxious about, not mine.'

'Not exactly,' said Mr. Yorke, who, angry as he was at his nephew's impertinent tone, did not wish to quarrel with him. 'As far as Sidney is concerned, I need only forbid him to drive with you to put an end to the risk for him.'

'He will be ready enough to obey you, I've no doubt. He is quite of your opinion that it is safer not to run any risk.'

At this covert sneer, Mr. Yorke looked at his son, but Sidney only laughed.

'Nonsense, Walter,' he said good-humouredly; 'if you mean to say that I am a coward, you know that's bosh. If I had been, I should have declined to go out with you long ago; but most assuredly, when Harkaway wishes to charge a wagon, I am of opinion that it is safer not to be in the cart behind him.'

'You can get Parker to look out for a horse for you if you don't fancy the chestnut,' said Mr. Yorke, thinking it was quite time to end the discussion,

‘but I will speak to him to-morrow about selling Harkaway. No, it is no use to argue the matter,’ as his nephew began to speak. ‘I have quite made up my mind about it. Surely, it would be much better to have a horse that you and Sidney could drive.’

‘Yes, that’s at the bottom of it all,’ burst out Walter, passionately, losing all control over himself; ‘it’s all Sidney. You can’t bear my doing anything better than he can. I won’t have a horse at all if I cannot have one fit for a gentleman to drive. If I don’t care about the risk, what can it matter to you? I have always had my own way before, and I will now! You have done nothing but thwart me ever since I came to this detestable place and I won’t stand it any longer. My mother said you would never let me have any pleasure if you got me into your clutches, and if my father had only known how you would treat me, he would never have left me to be domineered over by a—by a——’

‘Walter!’ interrupted Sidney, indignantly, ‘how dare you speak to my father like that! I’ve a very good mind to give you a good thrashing,’ and Sidney looked quite capable of carrying out his

threat. 'You deserve to be kicked out of the house,' and Sidney stalked out of the room.

'I can hardly take such strong measures as Sidney suggests,' said Mr. Yorke, quietly, after a short silence, 'though it may perhaps be advisable that we should part. I know you have always set yourself against my authority, but while you are under my roof you will have to obey me, whether you like it or not. You will have to do that for the present wherever you are, but I have thought before this that it would be better to make arrangements for you to live with someone you would not dislike as you do me. I cannot help thinking, however, that you will be ashamed of what you have just said by to-morrow morning,' and Mr. Yorke followed his son's example and went off to his room, leaving Walter alone with his own thoughts.

These thoughts were not of a pleasant or satisfactory kind. For some time he tried to nurse his wrath and fan the flame of his resentment. He stamped up and down the room vowing that he would never submit to be interfered with in this way. What did his uncle know about horses! He

wished he *could* get away from this abominable house; he hated the place, he hated his uncle, he detested Sidney. But somehow it did not do. Perhaps a year ago he might have kept it up longer, but the influence of his uncle's house had done more for him than he knew, and in a very short time his anger began to subside, and he threw himself into his favourite armchair with very different thoughts beginning to make themselves felt. Harkaway was a cranky-tempered brute it was true, and whatever his uncle might know about horses he was sure to let him have a voice in the matter, and probably would let him choose for himself in the long run. On the whole, too, he believed he was *rather*—no, *very* fond of that fellow Sidney, and as for his uncle, he was not sure now that he did hate him—rather the reverse; and when it came to the point, the idea of going away did not look well either. After gazing at the fire for a few minutes, Walter got up and began fidgeting about the room, picking up and putting down books in an absent sort of way, and walking moodily backwards and forwards. He had not waited till the next morning to be thoroughly ashamed of himself,

‘I suppose I shall have to eat humble pie,’ he muttered. ‘I dare say he’ll blow me up well, and the worst of it is I certainly deserve it, there’s no denying that. It’s rather like having a tooth drawn. But still—here goes!’

Mr. Yorke was standing by his fire excessively annoyed and vexed at his nephew’s conduct, when the door suddenly opened and Walter appeared.

‘Uncle Henry,’ he said, simply, as his uncle turned towards him, ‘I beg your pardon.’

‘That’s right, my boy,’ said Mr. Yorke, kindly. ‘I thought you would soon see that you were in the wrong. I know you do not care for me, but still I am sorry you think I wish to be unkind to you.’

‘I don’t,’ said Walter, hastily; ‘I’m not such an idiot as to think that. You won’t send me away, will you, uncle? If you do,’ he added, ‘I’ll go head-long to the bad, that I will!’

‘I don’t want it to come to that, Walter,’ replied Mr. Yorke, smiling at this boyish threat. ‘I was only thinking that we do not seem to hit it off together as I should wish, and that perhaps you would be happier with some one you liked better.’

‘But I don’t dislike you, Uncle Henry,’ exclaimed Walter, eagerly, ‘indeed I don’t. I wish you wouldn’t think that. I didn’t mean what I said. I *do* care for you and—and I would give a great deal,’ looking down and colouring, ‘to make you think better of me.’

‘I don’t think so very badly of you now,’ said Mr. Yorke, surprised, and not a little touched, at this unexpected glimpse of his nephew’s feelings. ‘Your father was a dear friend of mine, Walter, and for his sake I should like to keep you with me. I should be sorry indeed to think he would have regretted leaving you to my care. He was a kind, generous, good man; I should like to feel,’ laying his hand on the lad’s shoulder, ‘that I had helped his son to be, what had he lived he would have wished to see him, a thorough Christian gentleman—a gentleman in the highest and best sense of the word. You will try yourself, won’t you, my dear boy?’

‘Yes,’ was all Walter’s answer.

‘Then let us start on a fresh tack to-morrow,’ went on Mr. Yorke, in a lighter tone. ‘I’ll believe you are ashamed of what you said, and you must believe

that I am not always thwarting you just for the pleasure of it, or that I want to domineer.'

'Don't, uncle,' muttered Walter, getting very red.

'All right,' said Mr. Yorke, laughing, 'that's to be considered rubbed out. But now about the subject of our quarrel. Life is far too precious to be risked in such a mad way as our adventure this afternoon, so do not think me very hard if I stick to my decision.'

'No, uncle; and I don't care much for Harkaway. It was only——'

'Out of sheer opposition to me, eh? Yet do you know, Walter, I am uncommonly proud of my nephew's presence of mind and skill, and I am not going to condemn him to drive an antiquated cob! I think you will like Parker's horse if you will look at it with unprejudiced eyes. It is quite young and quite sufficiently fresh for—Sidney!'

'You are too bad, Uncle Henry,' said Walter, unable to help laughing. 'I must go and make it up with Sidney. I hope he won't give me a thrashing, though!'

'You deserved it, I must say,' remarked his uncle,

drily, 'especially as you intended to go this afternoon in direct defiance of me, didn't you?'

'Yes, I did,' said Walter, honestly, though a good deal abashed.

'Don't let that happen again, my good nephew, or I shall come down on you; but we will forget all that, and I believe we shall be better friends in future. Now off with you, and tell Sidney I have not turned you out at present.'

'Sidney!' and before he could turn round his arms were firmly seized from behind. 'Sidney! when are you going to pitch into me? Hadn't you better have it out before I am kicked out neck and crop? You would never believe what I have been doing, young man.'

'I can believe anything of *you*,' retorted Sidney.

'Now don't be snappish, Sid, for I've been eating humble pie. I am quite a good boy now, I assure you, and won't behave like that again. It is quite true, Sid,' as his cousin shook himself free without speaking. 'Of course, I know I behaved abominably, and I have told Uncle Henry so, and it's all right.'

'Do you really mean it?' asked his cousin, looking doubtfully at him.

‘Yes, I do,’ replied Walter, seriously, ‘and he was awfully kind about it too. I didn’t think he would have said what he did. Anyhow, I like him better than ever, and I mean to make him like me if I can.’

‘Of course you can, old fellow, if you choose. He does now, as far as that goes.’

‘Does he?’ said Walter, doubtfully, and after meditating for a few minutes over his uncle’s words, so very different from the ‘blowing up’ which he had expected, he roused himself and added in his usual manner, ‘You will be glad to hear that Harkaway is to depart, and to-morrow we will go and look up the—rocking-horse!’

CHAPTER VII.

DICK FOSTER.

‘It’s all very well, Elliot, to say you have done your best, but if you cannot do better than that after working here nearly a year, you’ll never be much use. Besides, it is not true; you can do well enough if you choose—it was nothing but downright carelessness. You have been late several times lately too, which is a thing I will not allow.’

‘Only twice, sir, and then Mrs. Watson was ill and asked me to go to the doctor for her.’

‘Well, that is no excuse for your bad work. And it is only a fortnight since I spoke to you before about it, didn’t I?’

‘Yes, sir, but——’

‘I won’t have any excuses,’ interrupted Mr. Richardson, angrily. ‘At first you took a great deal of trouble to learn, and I was willing to overlook any mistakes, but now it is simply abominable that you should spoil a large piece of work as you did yesterday. Last time you said you did not want Mr.

Sidney to be vexed by hearing a bad report of you, but you have soon left off trying to please him.'

'No, I have not, sir,' said Stephen, looking up rather indignantly. 'I have done my best ever since I have been here. Ask Mr. Watson, sir, and he will tell you that is the truth.'

'Ah! Watson was away yesterday, so I suppose you thought you would not be found out. You will be as bad as young Foster before long; the very next time I have to find fault with him he goes. As for you, I warned you before that I should speak to Mr. Sidney if it happened again, so you knew what you had to expect.'

'Yes, sir, I am sorry, but I have done my best and it was not——'

'Your fault, I suppose. Whose then, I should like to know?'

Stephen was about to speak but checked himself, and the foreman went on: 'Of course, you want to lay the blame on someone else, but I don't care for any excuses. Mr. Sidney will be in this afternoon, and I shall tell him and see what he thinks of it. Go back to your work.'

Stephen turned without a word and went out of the office, across the yard, and slowly mounted the stairs to the room where he worked. However wretched he felt, it was better not to stop to think about it, not to think how sorry his kind friend would be, or how easy it would be to—— But at this point Stephen pushed open the door and went back to his place.

‘Anything the matter, lad?’ asked Watson, the man under whom he was working, as, after a few minutes’ silence, he looked up and saw Stephen’s face.

Stephen nodded, not trusting himself to speak.

‘Got into hot water, eh?’

‘Yes,’ muttered Stephen.

‘What about?’ pursued the other, who was a kind-hearted man, and never could bear to see the lads in trouble. ‘Not about your work, surely. Why, lad,’ as Stephen nodded again, ‘no one knows more about your work than I do, I reckon, and I’ve never had a lad working with me who did better than you or who took such trouble to learn. For the matter of that, if I had the pick of all the lads I would

choose you, though you haven't been here long—so long as some of them.'

'Will you tell Mr. Sidney so?' exclaimed Stephen, eagerly. 'Will you tell Mr. Stephen that I have done my best?'

'Of course I will, if he asks me. Come, lad, you've known me a smartish time now, tell me what's up.'

'Mr. Richardson says I've been shamefully careless lately,' said Stephen, 'and yesterday some of the work here got spoilt, and he says I did it, and——'

'Yesterday,' interrupted the other, 'I know nothing of what happened yesterday. Who were you with then?'

'Mitchell wanted me with him, and I didn't understand his work, and, I suppose, when Mr. Richardson asked him he said I wasn't much use, so he thought I hadn't taken any trouble to learn. I shouldn't care so much, because I have done as well as I could, only he is going to tell Mr. Sidney, and he will think me so ungrateful after all his kindness,' and poor Stephen choked and turned away his head.

Watson considered the point a minute, and then

said: 'Who was working in this room yesterday besides you?'

'William Smith and Dick Foster.'

'And whatever it was that was done, Dick Foster did it.'

Stephen looked round sharply, and though he said nothing, he could not help Watson reading an affirmative in his eyes.

'Why didn't you tell him it was Foster?'

'He wouldn't let me speak,' returned Stephen. 'besides,' colouring and looking down, 'I didn't like to tell tales, and he said if he had any fault to find with Dick again he would turn him off.'

'Serve him right, too—the young scamp!' said Watson.

'But he's got such a bad home,' said Stephen. 'He said the other day his father was awful sometimes, and he would half murder him if he "got the sack."'

'They are a bad lot, it's true,' agreed Watson; 'but still I don't see why you should bear the blame.'

'I don't think he'll turn me off this time,' said Stephen, 'and I hope Mr. Sidney won't think I don't

care about pleasing him. If he does, I must try and shew him that I am really grateful. Perhaps I may be able to prove it some day. If you will tell him I've done well, he will be more likely to believe me.'

'Ay, lad, I'll do that,' returned Watson; 'and a little more, too,' he mentally added, as he resumed his work.

For the last ten months Stephen Elliot had been regularly employed at Mr. Yorke's factory, and though at first he had found the work very different from that to which he had been accustomed yet he had taken great pains to learn, bent upon getting on and showing Mr. Yorke and Sidney that he was trying to make the most of the chance they had given him. He was fortunate, too, in the man with whom he was working, for Watson was a good-natured, kind man, who spared himself no trouble in teaching the lads under him as soon as they showed themselves worth it. As Stephen lodged with him, he had plenty of opportunities of observing him, and saw that he was a quiet, well-behaved lad; and though he had not failed to notice that

Elliot never mentioned his previous life, and suspected that he had some good reason for his reserve on that point, yet, as he saw he was anxious to learn his work thoroughly, he did his best to help him. By degrees, too, he found that Stephen was always ready to do a good turn for Mrs. Watson, who was often ailing, or to help his younger boys with their school work, showing as he did so that he had been much better educated than any of them, he became quite attached to him, and would have been much vexed if anything had gone wrong with him. Stephen, on his part, returned the liking, and congratulated himself often on his good luck in falling in with such kind of people.

When the bell rang for the workmen to go to their dinner, Watson lingered behind, calling to Stephen to tell his wife he should not be home just yet; and though when he did get there he had only time for a very hurried meal, he looked well pleased with himself.

As the afternoon went on poor Stephen's spirits sank lower and lower, till at last a boy came hastily in. 'Elliot,' he called, 'Elliot, you're wanted in the office.'

‘All right,’ replied Stephen, though ‘all wrong’ would have been a truer answer as far as his feelings were concerned.

He was so long brushing his jacket and smoothing his hair, that Watson felt obliged to hurry him. ‘Don’t keep Mr. Sidney waiting, lad,’ he said, kindly. ‘It won’t do any good to put it off. Be off at once, and don’t dawdle. You know he is sure to be very kind.’

Stephen nodded, and ran down the stairs and knocked at the office door, and on receiving a reply, went in. He had expected to find Mr. Richardson there prepared to repeat his complaint, but Sidney was alone. ‘Well, Elliot,’ he began, ‘what have you to say for yourself?’

‘I’ve done my best—indeed I have, Mr. Sidney,’ Stephen burst out. ‘I do want to please you, though Mr. Richardson says I don’t, and—and—I couldn’t help it!’

‘Mr. Richardson says he had to speak to you a fortnight ago; couldn’t you help that?’

‘No, sir?’

‘Or some blunder you made before that?’

‘Yes, sir; that was my fault. Mr. Richardson gave me an order that I didn’t understand. Watson told me I had better go and ask again, but I was afraid he would say I had been inattentive; so I tried to find out what he meant, and made a mess of it. I know that was my fault, and that makes him think I am always careless; but Watson will tell you he never has to find fault with me, and—I couldn’t help it!’

Stephen had been so carefully examining an ink spot on the office table that he had not looked up after the first moment, but if he had seen the amused look on Sidney’s face he would have felt his trouble much lightened.

‘I don’t quite understand,’ Sidney said. ‘What is it you couldn’t help? By the way, Mitchell says you were not much use to him yesterday; how was that?’

‘I don’t understand his work, sir,’ replied Stephen. ‘I had never done it before. If I had known he would want me I would have asked Watson to explain it to me.’

‘That’s another thing you couldn’t help. But as

to this shameful piece of carelessness yesterday, I really don't think I shall take the trouble to beg you off.' Stephen looked so dismal that Sidney suddenly gave up his grave tone and laughed outright. 'Oh, Stephen, what a goose you are! I shan't beg you off, because you didn't do it. Do you suppose I don't know that you have been getting along like a house on fire? I know well enough you have done your best; and as for Watson, he can't say enough for you. But why on earth didn't you tell Richardson at once that it was Dick Foster's doing, not yours?'

'Mr. Richardson said he would turn him off,' said Stephen, so much relieved at this unexpected turn of events as to be scarcely able to speak; 'and his father will be furious if he gets discharged, and it will ruin him, too. Don't tell Mr. Richardson it was his doing, Mr. Sidney. I don't care now you know about it. I can't think how you found it out, though.'

'Unluckily, Mr. Richardson told *me*,' returned Sidney, 'so we can't keep it from him, I'm afraid.'

'Oh, then do get him to let Dick off!' exclaimed Stephen, eagerly. 'He will if you ask him.'

‘I will if I can,’ said Sidney; and as at that moment the door of an inner room opened and the foreman appeared, he went on, ‘Elliot wants to beg off Foster, and as *he* has had a blowing-up about it, can’t you let the other off cheap, Richardson?’

‘I really think if you had your own way the boys would do as they liked,’ said Mr. Richardson, who was by no means pleased with himself for having made a mistake. ‘I believe they all think they can shelter themselves behind you.’

‘I wish I were broader, then,’ said Sidney, merrily. ‘But there’s room enough for that scamp Dick this time.’

‘If you have done with Elliot, he may as well go back to his work,’ said the other. ‘Why didn’t you speak out at once, Elliot? I have no patience with such nonsense. If you chose to be so silly as to let me think you did it, you have no one to thank but yourself if you did get blamed. Watson tells me you have got on very well, so it was the more foolish of you not to say it was Foster. I am glad I have got to the bottom of it, though, and that you were not to blame. Now, don’t waste any more time.’

‘Thank you, sir,’ said Stephen; and he retreated, followed by Sidney.

‘It was not foolish at all, Stephen,’ he said, in a low tone, at the door. ‘On the contrary, it was very brave and generous, and I am proud of you. I’ll get Dick off;’ and slapping him warmly on the shoulder, he went back into the office, while Stephen returned to his work so vastly pleased with the praise that he hardly knew how to explain to his friend what had happened. His delight was rather diminished when a call for Dick Foster was heard, and he was not surprised when, after a short absence, that youth returned looking exceedingly sulky and bad-tempered, though he did not understand why he scowled at him in passing. As he was leaving the yard when work was over, he was accosted by Dick, in a violent fury.

‘What do you mean by telling tales of me?’ he demanded, fiercely. ‘What business had you to say anything about me, I should like to know?’

‘I didn’t tell tales of you, Foster,’ returned Stephen, quietly. ‘Mr. Richardson found it out somehow.’

‘Found it out after you had been chattering to that young gent who makes such a precious fuss with you! A fine row there’s been about it, and if father hears of it, I shall catch it that way, too. Just because you must needs go sneaking like that!’

‘I tell you I didn’t,’ retorted Stephen. Mr. Sidney said Mr. Richardson had told him it was your doing.’

‘A likely story!’ sneered Dick. ‘But I’ll be even with you yet, my lad! If Mr. Sidney knew all about his precious favourite, do you think he would be so mighty fond of him? I thought I had you there,’ as he saw Stephen wince. ‘Some of these days, my fine fellow, I’ll have my revenge. You have got me into a scrape this time, but if I get a drubbing, as most likely I shall, I’ll lay it down to your account, and as soon as I get a chance I’ll pay you back. as sure as my name is Dick Foster!’

CHAPTER VIII.

DICK FOSTER'S REVENGE.

DICK FOSTER got his 'drubbing,' coupled with many an assurance from his amiable parent that if it happened again he 'would break every bone in his body,' which it was Dick's private opinion he had nearly done already; and he lost no opportunity of repeating his threat of revenging himself upon Stephen, who was, he considered, the author of his woe. Stephen had once or twice tried to make him believe how far he had been from telling any tales, but Dick refused to listen; so at last he gave it up, and kept out of his way as much as possible, rather dreading what shape his vengeance might take. He was soon to discover.

A fortnight had passed, and Stephen had nearly forgotten the matter, when late one afternoon he received a peremptory summons to go at once to Mr. Richardson's room. As the foreman very often sent for one or other of the boys, he obeyed without any foreboding of trouble; but when he opened the door,

and saw Dick Foster with a half-sulky, half-triumphant expression on his face, he knew instinctively that this was the threatened revenge.

‘Elliot,’ began Mr. Richardson, gravely, ‘have you been in here before to-day?’

‘Yes, sir,’ replied Stephen; ‘I was here just after dinner.’

‘What did you come for?’

‘I was told you wanted me at once.’

‘Told I wanted you?’ repeated Mr. Richardson.

‘Who told you so?’

Stephen hesitated. ‘One of the boys, sir.’

‘How long were you here?’

‘I waited a few minutes, and then I went to work.’

‘If you thought I wanted you, why didn’t you wait till I came?’

Stephen made no reply. Mr. Richardson repeated the question.

‘When I found you were not here, I thought—’

‘Well?’ said Mr. Richardson, sharply.

‘I thought it was only a hoax.’

‘A hoax? Why on earth should it be a hoax?’

Was there anyone here when you came in, or did you see anyone about when you went away?’

‘No, sir.’

‘It is only fair to tell you why I am questioning you Elliot. While I was absent at dinner, my desk has been broken open, and some money stolen. What’s the matter?’ for, in spite of his efforts at self-control, Stephen turned pale, and had to lean against the wall for support. ‘The same thing happened once before,’ went on Mr. Richardson, after a pause, ‘but then the desk was unlocked, and I was not sure how much money was in it. This time I am determined to sift the matter to the bottom. I have ascertained that you and Foster were both seen in here after dinner. Foster was sent by one of the men on a message, but I can scarcely believe your story of being sent here by a hoax—it seems absurd! What have you to say about it?’

‘I did not touch the money, sir, and I know nothing about it.’

‘Foster volunteered at once to show me what he had in his pockets,’ went on Mr. Richardson. ‘Of course, I cannot compel you to do the same, though

it would be in your favour if you did. You do not agree to that?' for Stephen made no attempt to move.

'I have told you I did not touch the money, sir; and I do not see why you should suspect me any more than Foster.'

'Don't you?' said Dick Foster, who had not spoken before. 'I should think there was a very good reason.'

'What do you mean, Foster?' demanded Mr. Richardson.

'Only that this is not the first time Elliot has done this sort of thing, sir. He is an old hand at it. Why when he came here he had only just come out of gaol!'

So this was Dick Foster's revenge.

'Be careful what you say, Foster,' said Mr Richardson, turning sharply on him. 'You have no right to make that kind of accusation unless you are certain it is true.'

'Ask him, sir,' was Dick's rejoinder, 'and see if he can say it is false.'

'You hear what Foster says, Elliot. Do you deny it?'

‘No, sir. It is true.’

‘*True!*’ repeated Mr. Richardson, as if doubting whether he had heard aright. ‘Do you know what you are saying, Elliot? If that is true, of course it makes you liable to suspicion in this case. Are you attending to me?’ for Stephen looked scarcely conscious of what was going on.

‘Yes, sir,’ he answered, rousing himself. ‘I do not know how Foster heard of it, but it is true.’

‘You do not seem to care much about owning it,’ said Mr. Richardson, though the sight of Stephen’s white face might have shown him that was far from being the case. ‘What do you suppose Mr. Sidney will say when he hears this?’

‘Mr. Sidney knows all about it,’ said Stephen, with a feeling of great thankfulness that he had made a clean breast of it, without waiting to be found out, ‘and so does Mr. Yorke.’

At this announcement Dick Foster’s face fell considerably.

‘Well, you cannot be surprised that I suspect you now. If you took the money, you had better speak the truth about it at once; if not, you must take the consequences.’

‘I have spoken the truth,’ said Stephen, in a low voice; ‘I did not take the money.’

Dick shrugged his shoulders, and Mr. Richardson without another word went to the door, and calling a boy from the opposite side of the yard, gave him an order, and then going back to his desk, sat down and began writing a letter, entirely ignoring the two lads. As the minutes passed on, Foster, who had been looking the picture of successful malice, began to get very nervous, and wondering what was going to happen, and to feel doubtful if his well-planned revenge was turning out, after all, quite as he wished. Stephen Elliot still leant against the wall, his face perfectly colourless, his eyes fixed on the ground, so motionless, that he might have been carved in stone, save for an occasional long-drawn breath. It seemed an hour to him before there came a decided knock at the door. He knew what would happen directly, he thought dreamily. He had gone back in imagination some months, and knew that he should see——

‘Good afternoon, sir.’

No, that was not the voice he expected to hear, and at the sound of it a feeling of relief came over him,

and he would have looked up, only somehow he couldn't move, and——

‘Good afternoon, sir,’ repeated Davis, advancing into the room, and taking everything in at a glance. ‘What’s the matter, Elliot? Lie down a minute, lad. Mr. Richardson, have you got any water there? No, no, I shan’t hurt you, my boy. Lie still,’ as Stephen began struggling to get up, and muttering incoherently. ‘No, there’s nothing the matter with your head now. Come, drink this, and don’t try to speak.’

Stephen drank some water, and after lying still a few minutes, opened his eyes and looked up at Davis.

‘I thought I was at Hessingham and that it was Roberts,’ he said slowly. I am glad it is you. I’m all right now; let me get up.’

‘Very well, lad,’ returned Davis, helping him up. ‘Sit down there, and let me hear what Mr. Richardson wants me for.’

He put Stephen into a chair, and then turned to Mr. Richardson, and listened to his account of what had happened, glancing now and again at the two lads.

‘Elliot tells me,’ said Mr. Richardson, ‘that Mr. Yorke and Mr. Sidney were both aware that he had been in gaol, but I don’t know how far that is to be believed.’

‘That is true enough,’ said Davis. ‘He told them both before he was taken on, so that if it came out they might not think he had deceived them; and very lucky for him that he did, as it turns out. As far as I understand, both the lads have been in here alone to-day, and at present the only reason for suspecting Elliot is the fact that he has been convicted before.’

‘Partly,’ assented Mr. Richardson, ‘and partly his absurd story of having been hoaxed to account for his being here. Also he declines to show what he has in his pockets, which Foster was quite willing to do. Of course, he is not bound to do so unless I decide to give him in charge; but I do not see why he should object.’

‘Could you identify any of the money?’ asked Davis.

‘Yes, as it happens, I could. Amongst it was a curious gold coin which Mr. Hepburn brought from some foreign place. He was showing it me the other

day, and left it on the table, and I put it into my desk, intending to return it to him, and forgot it.'

The policeman watched Elliot narrowly, but not the smallest change was visible on his face at this remark.

'Come here, Elliot,' was all he said; and Stephen instantly rose and stood in front of him. 'Who was the boy who told you Mr. Richardson wanted you?'

'Charles Harris, sir.'

'How long did you stay about here?'

'Between five and ten minutes, sir. I knocked twice, and then waited outside.'

'What made you think it was a hoax?'

'I remembered that Mr. Richardson was not likely to be back so soon, and besides——'

'Well?'

'Harris said another boy had told him, and I've had roundabout messages like that before. They often do play me tricks.'

'What kind of tricks?'

'Telling me Mr. Sidney Yorke wants me. The other day I waited all dinner-time for him, and it

was only a hoax. Of course, I don't mind about that, it's only a bit of fun.'

'Did you come in here before or after Elliot?' Davis inquired, turning to Foster, who was beginning to think this kind of questioning was not what he meant.

'Before he did.'

'Did you notice if anything was amiss with the desk?'

'No—yes—I don't know,' stammered Dick.

'You don't know?' continued Davis. 'I didn't ask if there *was* anything amiss with the desk, only if you *noticed* it. You know that, I suppose?'

'I didn't notice,' said Dick, sullenly.

'Did you know anything about this hoax?'

'No,' replied Dick, still more sulkily.

'There's Charles Harris, said Davis, as a boy passed the window, and opening it, he called him in. 'Harris, had you anything to do with hoaxing Elliot to-day?'

'Hoaxing Elliot?' exclaimed the boy, looking in amazement from one to the other. 'No, I never hoaxed him.'

‘ Did you tell him that Mr. Richardson wanted him directly after dinner? ’

‘ Yes, I did; but I don’t know anything about it being a hoax. Harry Adams told me to tell him. ’

‘ Find Adams and send him here, ’ ordered Mr. Richardson.

‘ And don’t tell him why we want him, ’ added Davis. ‘ I think, Foster, ’ he continued, ‘ it would be as well if you went into the other room for a few minutes. You don’t want to go? But you see I intend that you shall. Off with you! ’

Dick, who had fully meant to frighten poor little Harry Adams into saying what he liked, felt as if he was getting more than he bargained for. In his calculations he had not included a keen-witted policeman. He would have resisted had he dared, but not daring, he moved slowly away, disappearing through one door just as Harry Adams entered at the other.

‘ Well, little man, ’ said Davis, as Harry looked terribly alarmed at the awful spectacle of a big policeman so very close, ‘ did you tell Charlie Harris this afternoon that Mr. Richardson wanted Elliot? ’

‘ Yes, sir, I did, ’ replied Harry, relieved at being

asked such a very easy question. 'Dick Foster told me to run and tell him.'

'Where was Foster when he told you?'

'Just coming out of this room.'

'That will do, Harry; you can run away now. Elliot,' turning to the lad, 'will you let me see what you have in your pockets?'

'Yes, of course,' said Stephen, readily, and without a moment's hesitation he emptied his pockets on to the table—a knife, some bits of string, one or two pencils, and a purse, which he held out to Davis.

'There seems to be a good deal of money in it,' remarked the policeman, opening it. 'How came you with all this?'

'It's not all mine,' replied Stephen; 'some of it belongs to Watson, and some to Smith. They went home before pay-time, and asked me to take their money.'

'Are you in the habit of taking their pay for them?'

'Oh, yes! I've done so lots of times if they are in a hurry to get home.'

'How much money was there in the desk?' inquired Davis.

Mr. Richardson mentioned the amount, and the other, having counted the contents of the purse, looked sharply at Elliot. Then he examined the purse minutely, and opening the small packet intended for stamps he drew out a small piece of gold, at the sight of which Mr. Richardson uttered an exclamation. It was a foreign coin of a very peculiar kind.

CHAPTER IX.

GONE!

‘Is that the coin you mentioned?’ asked Davis, as he held it out to Mr. Richardson.

‘Yes, most assuredly it is,’ was the reply.

‘It is *not*, sir!’ burst out Stephen, almost passionately. ‘Mr. Sidney gave me that. He gave me the purse the day before he went away for a Christmas-box, because he said’—Stephen’s voice shook—‘he said I had been a credit to him, and he put that in the pocket for luck;’ and then seeing the incredulous look on Mr. Richardson’s face, he broke down, and throwing himself into the chair, he laid his head on the table.

For a few minutes no one spoke, then the policeman said a little reluctantly, ‘Do you wish me to take him into custody, sir?’

‘Oh, don’t do that!’ exclaimed Stephen before Mr. Richardson could reply, speaking in a low tone, but quite calmly. ‘I have tried so hard to get on, and though I deserved it before, indeed I am innocent

now. I know you won't believe me, but only wait till to-morrow, and ask Mr. Sidney. He is at Hepburn Hall, and you can easily send to him; and it means ruin to me, for I should have no time to get him to speak for me. It would vex him so terribly, too. Do have a little mercy, sir, and let me alone till to-morrow !'

'And give you time to escape, I suppose,' said Mr. Richardson, coldly.

'Elliot will not do that,' interposed Davis, quietly. 'I will answer for his not attempting to make off.' Stephen looked up gratefully.

'No, I won't. But I don't ask you to trust me. There are plenty of rooms here where you can lock me up if you will, so as to prevent any chance of that.'

Mr. Richardson hesitated. He knew how terribly distressed Sidney would be, and though he had no doubt himself, it would be more satisfactory to have the matter clearly proved before proceeding to extremities.

'Will you let me have a few words with you in the other room?' said Davis, and to this Mr. Richardson assented.

‘I had almost forgotten that boy,’ he said, as he opened the door, and saw Dick looking by no means comfortable. ‘You can go now, Foster, but let me advise you to be more careful about speaking the truth. If you are wanted as a witness, the lies you have told to-day will make it very awkward for you.’

Dick, only too glad to escape, bolted out of the office, and Davis closed the door.

‘I think, Mr. Richardson,’ he began, ‘as Mr. Yorke wished me to look after Elliot a little, I should like to tell you about him before you decide. There is no doubt that the coin and the amount of money are suspicious circumstances, but, on the other hand, he would scarcely dare to say that young Mr. Yorke had given him the coin, or that the money belonged to Watson and Smith, if it is not true, as, of course, I can find that out at once. Then he was certainly sent here by a hoax, whether in fun or not is not quite certain, and it is in his favour that he gave up his purse without any hesitation, and without seeming the least afraid, though he heard you mention that coin.’

‘He knew you would search him,’ remarked Mr. Richardson.

‘So did Dick Foster,’ said the other, drily. ‘For the matter of that, both lads had plenty of time to hide the money elsewhere.’

‘As for being afraid, it struck me as being most suspicious that he should faint directly he saw you.’

‘Oh, that had nothing to do with it,’ said Davis.

‘Nothing to do with it?’

‘No, sir. I doubt if he saw me at all. He was very much upset by the accusation, and knew how the other business would tell against him, which frightened him, and while he was waiting for some one to come, and dreading whom it might be, he got bewildered and went back to the former affair. He mistook me for the other man, and kept begging me not to be cruel to him, and not to hurt his head. He was thrown down before, and his head was so much hurt that he was ill for some weeks, and I suppose when I put him down on the floor, he had a confused notion that it was all coming over again.’

‘No doubt that is possible,’ said Mr. Richardson, remembering the half-unconscious expression on Stephen’s face.

‘ I ought to tell you that Mr. Yorke wished me to find out all about him to see if his story was true, and not only was it perfectly true, but he had not attempted to excuse himself as he might have done. There had never been a doubt as to his honesty before, and everyone knew he had been made a tool of by a rascal who was working with him. One of the magistrates expressed his regret at having to convict him, and another gentleman wrote to Mr. Yorke as soon as he heard he was here, and said he would have found plenty of friends to help him, if he had not been so foolish as to run away. He offered to have him now if he was not getting on at this work, but Elliot said he couldn’t bear to go back, and would rather stay here, at all events till he had got back a character.’

‘ He has not been used to this work, I suppose?’

‘ No; and it is rather hard for him, I think. I have been watching him all the time and felt sure he was doing well. Mr. Yorke and Mr. Sidney are both much interested in him, and I think they would be glad if you would wait till to-morrow; but, of course, it is for you to decide, and I will take him away now if you wish.’

‘And think me a hard-hearted brute, as Mr. Sidney will, eh?’ said Mr. Richardson. ‘Surely you don’t think I should not take notice of a thing like this.’

‘Of course not, sir. I’m the last man in the world to say that. If he did it, he deserves to be punished, and it is kinder in the end to put a stop to it; but it will make no difference waiting till to-morrow to hear what Mr. Yorke says.’

‘Unless he bolts!’

‘He won’t do that. I’ll take him home with me, and I’m certain he may be trusted not to run off. If I were not sure of that, I should not risk it.’

‘Very well then,’ said Mr. Richardson. ‘You ask Watson and Smith about the money, and I will write to Mr. Sidney and ask him to come in as early as he can to-morrow. We had better tell Elliot, for I should think he is being pretty well punished by this suspense.’

It appeared that he was, indeed, and even Mr. Richardson’s severe face softened a little as he met Stephen’s piteous look.

‘We will wait till to-morrow, Elliot,’ he said, less sternly than he had spoken before. ‘It seems

to me an unlikely story, but we will see what Mr. Sidney Yorke says. Mr. Davis is confident that you will not attempt to escape, so you may go with him, and I hope that you will not be so foolish as to try to do so.'

'No sir, I will not,' said Stephen.

He was following Davis to the door, when he suddenly stopped and went back

'I ought to have thanked you, sir,' he said. 'I am not afraid of what Mr. Sidney will say, and Watson and Smith will tell you they asked me to get their pay, but if you think so badly of me as to believe I could deliberately steal here, where everyone has been so kind to me, I am afraid you will always think me guilty, even if you cannot prove it. It is only just that everyone should be more willing to believe lads who have always been—who have always been honest, and to be suspected when I am innocent is part of my punishment. It is more than I could expect that you should trust me to-night, and I should like to ask you at least to believe that I am not bad enough to abuse your kindness and to run away, though I know that you may send me to—to gaol to-morrow.'

Something in the sad, white face, in the low, un-boyish voice, in the weary droop of the whole lad, as if this trouble were more than he could bear, touched the heart of the foreman as nothing had ever done before.

‘I do not *wish* to prove you guilty, Elliot,’ he said more kindly than Stephen would have believed possible. ‘Don’t think me so cruel as that. I hope Mr. Sidney will confirm your story; I shall be very glad if he does; at all events, I will wait till I have seen him. If your account of the coin and the money is true, I shall not think you guilty any more than Foster; in fact, from what Davis has told me about you, I should be more inclined to believe you, as he has certainly been lying and deceitful, and you spoke the truth when it must have been terribly hard to do so. I should not think of having you taken up on such slight ground of suspicion as merely having been to the office, especially as Foster was here, too, so you need not be afraid of that. Now go with Mr. Davis for the present, and come back to-morrow when he tells you. Good evening, Davis; good evening, Elliot.’

But this time Stephen could not trust himself to speak, and he hurried out of the room, leaving Mr. Richardson not a little surprised at the sudden interest he felt in the lad whom he had looked upon a few minutes before as a worthless young thief. He little thought that twenty-four hours later he should be remembering with pleasure the look of relief and gratitude that had brightened poor Stephen's face at his kinder tone, and thinking with great satisfaction that at least his last words to him that afternoon had been considerate and kindly.

Stephen did not speak as he followed Davis out of the yard, but when they reached the street, he said, timidly, 'What are you going to do with me?'

'Going to hand you over to my wife's care,' said Davis, cheerfully, seeing that the lad had, as he expressed it, about as much as he could bear, 'and tell her to see that you have a good tea.'

'You are very kind,' said Elliot, gratefully. 'I was so glad when I saw you there. I can't think what made me go off like that; my head seemed to get into a muddle, and I did not know where I was till I heard your voice. My head has been rather stupid lately; I don't know what is the matter with it.'

‘Since you were ill?’ asked Davis.

‘Yes. How did you know I had been ill? I remember, you understood directly about my head.’

‘I know all about it, lad; and how you got hurt.’

‘It couldn’t be helped,’ said Stephen; ‘and they were all very kind when they found I was really ill and not shamming. It was only just at first they didn’t believe I could not understand what they meant, or remember anything; but I was very well taken care of afterwards, better than I should have been at my—my uncle’s.’

‘You will want taking care of again soon, if I’m not mistaken,’ thought his companion, looking keenly at him, but aloud he only said, ‘Well, don’t think about that any more, or you will make your head bad.’

‘Yes,’ said Stephen, taking off his cap, and pushing his hair off his forehead. ‘It aches terribly now, and I mustn’t be ill to-morrow if I—— Will you give Watson and Smith their money?’ he broke off to ask, ‘or they will wonder why I don’t take it.’

‘I can’t give it them to-night,’ said Davis, ‘but I shall have to see them both presently, you know.’

‘Oh, yes; I had forgotten,’ muttered Stephen, and he did not speak again.

‘There, go in,’ said Davis, when they reached his house. ‘Here, wife, Stephen Elliot is in a bit of trouble, and I want you to look after him, and make him take some tea. He will have to sleep here to-night, but he will tell you all about it;’ and seeing that Stephen was on the point of breaking down, John Davis shut the door and disappeared, muttering to himself that the women-folk were the best hands at that sort of thing, and his good woman would be sure to know what to say to the lad.

Mrs. Davis came quite up to her husband’s expectations, and in a short time she not only contrived to make Stephen eat a good meal, but she comforted and cheered him by her hearty assurances that of course she knew he hadn’t done it, and it would be all right. ‘And Davis doesn’t suspect you either, though he can’t say so,’ she continued, ‘or he wouldn’t have let you come here; so, if I were you, I would not make myself ill by worrying over it to-night, but just say your prayers and leave it,’ which was, perhaps, as good advice as she could have given him.

After some discussion, Mrs. Davis agreed to Stephen’s request to be allowed to lie down on his

old friend, the sofa, and she had brought him a thick rug, which he declared would make him perfectly comfortable, when a neighbour rushed in. 'Oh, Mrs. Davis!' she exclaimed, 'do come to Mrs. Saunders. She has been took that bad and keeps asking for you.'

'Poor soul!' returned Mrs. Davis. 'Ay, to be sure, I'll come,' and telling Stephen he had better go to sleep without waiting for her, she caught up a shawl and bustled off.

It was getting late before she was able to leave her poor friend, and she expected to find Stephen asleep and her husband in bed, but to her surprise when she opened the door the kitchen was empty. The lamp was alight and the fire burning, but the rug she had given Stephen was folded up on the sofa, as she had left it. Thinking that her husband might have taken him upstairs, she went up to look, but he was not there.

Much perplexed, Mrs. Davis searched everywhere, even going to the bottom of the garden and calling him, but in vain, and at last she was reluctantly obliged to believe that he was gone. What would

John say? and that reminded her that he ought to have been at home some time ago, and, very anxious to consult him, she opened the door and looked up and down the street. He was not to be seen, but a policeman she knew well was coming slowly along.

‘Have you seen Davis anywhere?’ she called to him, as he came up.

‘He was down at the station when I started,’ he replied, coming across to her. ‘There was something up there. A boy brought a message that Davis was wanted somewhere, and he was to go at once or he would be too late. It was that half-witted lad of Green’s and he wouldn’t tell anyone but Davis, and they were trying to make out what he meant when I left. I don’t suppose Davis will get away yet; I believe some of them were going off to see if there was anything in it.’

Relieved about her husband, Mrs. Davis returned to her kitchen, but though she sat up some time, neither Davis nor Stephen appeared, and she was compelled to come to the conclusion that for once John had been deceived, and that the boy to whom he had been so kind had broken his word and run away.

Whether he was really guilty, which even now she could not believe, or whether he was terrified at being suspected, and dreaded that he should not be able to clear himself—whatever might be the reason, there was no doubt that Stephen Elliot had gone.

CHAPTER X.

UNDER THE WALL.

It was unfortunate for Stephen, though, as it turned out, exceedingly fortunate for someone else, that Mrs. Davis should have been called away on that particular evening. Had she remained at home she would have kept him from brooding over his troubles, and would have insisted upon his having a good rest. But left to himself he began thinking over all that had happened, and dwelling upon each point till he had made himself thoroughly miserable, and nearly convinced himself that there was no hope of his being cleared. The matter seemed to lie between him and Dick Foster, and when the money and the coin were put right, as he knew they would be, still there remained the fact that someone had broken open the desk, and if it were a question of his word against Dick's, who would believe him? He remembered with some little comfort that Mr. Richardson had been quite kind at last, and had said he did not mean to make any difference between them,

but when once the story got about other people would, there was no doubt about that. It was odd, too, that the coin should be exactly like his. Suppose Mr. Sidney should not be able to convince Mr. Richardson that the coin *was* the one which he had given him, and at this thought Stephen sprang up and began pacing the kitchen in despair. If he could not swear that it was the identical coin he had put into the purse, then—— He stood still and gazed blankly at the fire. How his head ached! What had he heard the doctor say just before he pronounced him well? ‘He ought not to be over-excited or worried for some time, or it will be very bad for him.’ He felt bad enough now, and if he was ill to-morrow and did not know what he said, as had happened before, that would be ruin to him.

By this time poor Stephen had worked himself into such a state of nervous excitement that he was quite incapable of thinking clearly, and would probably have brought on the illness which he dreaded had not a small incident served to distract his attention, and to divert his thoughts for a short time

from himself. Mrs. Davis's pet cat, who had been out taking an evening stroll, bethought herself that it was past the time when she was usually summoned to supper and bed, and, on arriving at the door into the garden, was surprised to find it shut. Much displeased, she set up an emphatic mewing, demanding her meal in such plaintive and energetic tones as at length penetrated to Stephen's brains.

'Why, Cinder!' he exclaimed, opening the door, 'did your mistress forget you? Come in, old girl, and let's see if we can find some milk.'

Cinder, who rejoiced in the name of Cinderella, owing to her favourite habit of sitting in the grate, marched in with tail erect and stood in the middle of the kitchen, regarding Stephen with such an air of insulted dignity that he could not help laughing. 'Too bad, wasn't it, beauty?' he said, stroking her; whereupon Cinder arched her back, and rubbed herself backwards and forwards against his hand, and, being presented with her saucer of milk, sat down to enjoy it in comfort, keeping up a loud and continuous purring all the time. The feeling of companionship, though only of an animal, dispelled for a short

time Stephen's gloomy forebodings, and he poked up the fire and watched Cinder making her toilet after her meal. Cinder purred on for a while, but finally yawned several times and curled herself up on the sofa for her night's rest.

'You'll have to turn off that presently, madam,' remarked Stephen; 'I wonder when Mrs. Davis will be back.' He went to the window, and pulled the curtain aside.

'What a jolly night! I believe Jack Watson will be right, and that pond will bear in another day. We might go to-morrow evening and have a try—ah!—I had forgotten.'

He dropped the curtain and walked up and down, pressing his hand to his forehead, till presently he began to long to get out into the open air, feeling as if it would take some of the weight off his head. Davis would not mind, he knew, if he only went into the garden, where no one would be likely to see him. He had not the slightest intention of making off, and perhaps he should be able to sleep if he got out for a few minutes. So, putting another coal on the fire, he opened the door and went out.

It was a clear night and though there was no moon, the sky was lighted by an innumerable company of stars, which seemed to Stephen to be looking down upon him with friendly sympathy, as if calling to him to look up through the sorrow and trouble of the world below to the bright light of the world above. Stephen's parents had been good, religious people, and, though he had been left while young to the care of an uncle and aunt who were careless and indifferent, he had never forgotten his early teaching, and his sorrow for his sad fall had been much deepened by the knowledge of the grief it would have caused his father and mother. He had been fortunate during the time he had been at Beecham in living with a man like Watson, who went regularly to church, with his two boys, on Sundays, and, as a matter of course, expected Stephen to go too; and as he paced slowly up and down the long, narrow garden his thoughts took a different turn.

Insensibly the quiet night, the stillness all around him, the broad sky overhead, soothed and comforted him, and the twinkling stars in the heavens above

reminded him of One Who knew him to be innocent, whatever man might believe. After all, if the worst did happen, he had one great comfort which had been wanting before—the real sting of the punishment lay in the fact that he deserved it. But now, however hard it might be to bear, the sense of guilt was not added to his troubles. And there was some who would believe him, he felt sure. He was certain Mr. Sidney would, and he had no doubt of the Watsons and good Mrs. Davis; and he guessed that Davis had his own ideas on the subject. By the way, how foolish he had been to worry about being ill! Davis knew all about what had happened before, and if his head got worse he would be able to explain how it was, and would see that he was taken care of till he was all right again; and this idea relieved him greatly. After walking up and down for some time, he went to the door at the bottom of the garden, which opened into a lane, on the other side of which was a small field. Scarcely thinking of what he was doing, Stephen opened the door, and stood for a moment looking out; and then he remembered that in this field was the shallow pond which Jack Wat-

son had declared would bear by the next day. A sudden desire to see for himself, while he had the chance, whether Jack was right came over him, and after hesitating a minute, he decided that there would be no harm in it. Hardly anyone came that way, and, after looking up and down to see that no one was in sight, he ran up the lane and into the field. He soon found that Jack was quite correct, and, having crossed the ice two or three times to put the matter beyond doubt, he rather reluctantly retraced his steps.

He had not gone many yards down the lane when he heard footsteps approaching from the opposite direction, and to his great dismay he recognised Dick Foster! What he could be doing there he could not imagine, but it was the most unlucky thing that could have happened. He did not want to meet Dick after what had passed; and, besides, he knew, though he had not been told, that Davis would rather he did not speak to anyone, and certainly would have forbidden him to talk to Dick. And it would give Dick a chance of saying all sorts of things—that he was intending to escape, that he had tried

to make him hold his tongue. No one knew what falsehoods he might invent.

All this crossed his mind in an instant, and he looked to see if in any way he could avoid meeting. Close to him was a large tree, the branches of which hung over the garden wall of one of the houses, and without a second's delay he seized the lowest branch and swung himself up on to the wall, where he was completely hidden by the trunk of the tree. He thought he could remain there till Foster had gone by, and then slip down and make the best of his way back; but, to his astonishment, Dick stopped, and, after looking up and down the lane, sat down on the projecting roots of the tree, evidently expecting someone to join him. He had not long to wait; in a few minutes a low whistle was heard, which Dick answered.

'Well, young shaver, here you are,' was the greeting of the new-comer, as he reached him. 'Now, where's that precious father of yours? Has he backed out of it, and left us in the lurch?'

'Not he!' returned Dick, in his surliest tone. 'No such good luck! I would have backed out of it, though, if I had had the chance!'

‘You’re a muff, then,’ returned the other. ‘You haven’t a morsel of pluck, or you would enjoy a bit of a spree like this!’

‘A bit of a spree!’ grumbled Dick. ‘Not much of a spree in it, I reckon! A spree, with the chance of blue-coats and handcuffs at the end of it, isn’t much fun, as far as I can see!’

‘Fudge! there’s no fear of that for you. If you are seen driving the cart back, no one can say you had——’

‘I’ve a good mind to bolt!’ interrupted Dick, passionately. ‘If I got hauled up to-morrow about that other affair, a pretty mess I shall be in if I’m seen out to-night!’

‘Oh well, stick to it you know nothing about it,’ said the other, carelessly. ‘What’s the odds?’

‘If I never stick to anything worse than that it won’t matter,’ returned Dick; ‘for, if that young fool of an Elliot didn’t do it, I’ll be hanged if I know who did! I’ve a good mind to cut and run—that I have!’ and Dick got up and moved a few steps away.

‘Eh? What?’ inquired a fresh voice. ‘What’s up now? What, that plucky young Foster showing the

white feather? Well now, who would have thought it?’

At the sound of that voice Stephen started so violently that he nearly fell off the wall. Good cause had he to remember those taunting, sneering tones, and his heart beat so fast, and he turned so sick and faint, that for some seconds* he heard nothing of the conversation beneath him.

‘How far is it to this precious place, Jem?’ was the first thing he heard when he recovered himself.

‘About three miles,’ was the answer; ‘but it won’t do to go straight there. We shall have to go by the other road and through the wood, and there we will leave Dick and the cart.’

Dick growled angrily that he wasn’t going to be left there alone.

‘My good lad, you’ll do as you’re told. Very likely we shall take you with us, and slip you in at the window to open the door.’

‘Not if I know it!’ said Dick furiously. ‘Why, both the young gents would know me in a minute if they saw me, and I’ll not——’

‘All right,’ interrupted Jem. ‘Let him alone,

Jake; what's the sense of bullying him? You'll be all right, Dick; you've only to stay with the cart till we have fetched the things; and, once we're off, you shall have a fine tip.'

'More likely to have something else,' grumbled Dick; 'the young master is sure to take Elliot's part and get me a drubbing as he did before.'

'Well, if I come across him to-night, I'll pay off your score for you,' said the man who was called Jake. 'I'll give give him such a fright as he hasn't had in his life before.'

'Pshaw!' ejaculated Dick, 'you'll not do that. I hate him; but he's a game-bird, he is. It would take a good deal to frighten young Mr. Yorke.'

'Hush, you dolt,' said the other angrily, looking round. 'What do you want to mention names for?'

'He's not half a bad one, it's true,' remarked Jem. 'I wish he was anywhere else to-night, or that I——'

'Or that you were, eh?' sneered the other; 'you'll be crying off directly, I suppose. But that won't do, my fine fellow, or I'll know the reason why. You're a nice lot, on my word; as easy a job as can be, no risk and your fortune made, and you want to get out of it.'

‘Not I,’ said the other, and the two men lowered their voices, and Stephen could only catch a few words, ‘monstrous heavy,’ ‘window behind,’ and so on.

‘Here’s Ned at last,’ said Jake, as a low whistle was heard. ‘Ned, this boy of yours is turning crusty and don’t want to come.’

‘Don’t he?’ was the rejoinder, accompanied by a good deal of strong language. ‘I’ll see to that;’ and from the sounds below it was very evident that, if his father ‘saw to it,’ Dick *felt* it. ‘Now go and get into the cart, if you don’t want every bone in your body broken. Is it all square, Jem?’

‘Ay, they think I’m in bed with the toothache.’ The others laughed. ‘I opened the window an inch or so before I started, and it won’t take us many minutes to get the things out.’

‘Come on, then,’ and the three men proceeded down the lane.

Elliot listened to their retreating footsteps till he was sure they were safely off, and then dropping from his perch he picked his way cautiously up the lane, and the next minute he was flying across the field.

CHAPTER XI.

A RUN IN THE DARK.

FOR some minutes Stephen Elliot ran as hard as he could with only one idea in his mind, that of getting to his kind friend to warn him of his danger. But he soon felt that he could not keep this up long, and he slackened his pace and tried to calculate in how short a time he could reach the Hall. He had often been there, and knew that the distance was so much less across the fields, that it was possible he might get there first, especially as the men would have to use considerable caution in driving through the wood. If his head had been clear, he would have known that by far the best thing to do would have been to go to the police and tell them what he had heard; but, upset by all that had happened, and terrified by the unexpected appearance of the man who had been his evil genius before, he had lost all power of reasoning, and only felt that he must get to Sidney as fast as possible.

But as he sped along the thought occurred to him, and he paused for an instant and debated, whether if he retraced his steps he should be in time; but he knew that to be impossible, and he decided to go on. Perhaps, when he reached the high road, along which he would have to go a short distance before taking to the fields again, he might meet someone by whom he might send a message. But no one was in sight, and it was not till he was just stepping over the stile into the field that he heard steps approaching. Very wavering, uncertain steps they were, and to his great vexation he saw that it was only a poor half-witted lad, named Abel Green. Still, it was possible he might have sense enough to repeat what was told him if he could only get him to attend. He waited till the lad came up and then accosted him cheerfully.

‘Why, Abel, man! Where are you going at this time of night?’

‘Home,’ returned the lad. ‘Abel’s going home. Is it the Queen’s birthday?’ he demanded abruptly.

‘Not just yet,’ replied Stephen, who knew this to be Abel’s usual question, prompted, sad to say, not

entirely by feelings of loyalty, but by the recollection of a cake which had been given him on that occasion. 'Wait till it's warm weather, Abel, and then——'

'What shall we say?'

'The Queen! God bless her!' responded Stephen, promptly, taking off his cap as he knew Abel expected.

Abel repeated the words and action, and then shifted from one foot to the other and laughed in great glee.

'You would like a cake, wouldn't you?' said Stephen. 'I'll give you such a big one Abel, if you'll do something for me.'

Abel nodded. 'Stephen's good to Abel,' he said, 'Abel will do it.'

'Go as fast as you can and find a policeman for me, Abel, and tell him—you know a policeman—a blue-coat, when you see one, don't you, Abel?'

Abel drew himself up, seized Stephen suddenly by the collar and said in a gruff voice, 'Now, then, what are you doing? Come along with me now. I've got you safe enough!'

‘Ay, to be sure, that’s it,’ said Stephen, releasing himself and inwardly fuming at the loss of time, but knowing the lad must be humoured. ‘Now, you go and find one—Davis if you can——’

‘Oranges!’ interrupted Abel, chuckling. ‘Oranges!’

‘Yes, and he’ll give you another if you make haste. Go and find Davis and tell him to come as quick as he can to the Hall to save Mr. Sidney. Ask any of them where Davis is, they will tell you.’

‘Abel likes blue-coats, they’re good to him,’ the lad said, vaguely.

‘Yes, of course they are,’ returned Stephen, rejoicing that the police were always so good-natured to the poor fellow who was well-known in the town and neighbourhood that he would have no fear of speaking to any of them.

He did not dare to burden Abel with a longer message, and could only trust the rest would be guessed, and though he searched hastily in his pockets for a scrap of paper, he had emptied them in the office, nor had he anything to serve as a bribe.

‘Buttons!’ suddenly exclaimed Abel, pointing to the brass buttons on Stephen’s fustian jacket, which

he wore at work and had had no opportunity of changing. 'Jolly buttons!'

'I'll give you one,' wrenching one off as he spoke, 'and you shall have some more to-morrow if you'll run as fast as you can to Davis.'

'One—two—three? Jolly buttons,' chuckled Abel.

'Six,' responded Stephen, pointing to them in quick succession. 'You shall have all six, and you'll do what I ask you, won't you?'

'Abel will,' said the lad simply. 'Stephen never teases Abel—he will go and find Davis for him.'

'That's right, that's a good fellow,' said Stephen, patting him on the shoulder, and feeling well rewarded at that moment for having always listened patiently to Abel's wandering talk. 'And what shall you say to him?'

'Go to the Hall to save Sidney.'

'And be quick or you'll be too late,' added Stephen.

Abel repeated it twice and then nodded his head. 'Abel knows—Abel will run all the way,' and without more words he set off in his shambling, ungainly trot, which nevertheless carried him over the ground at a great pace.

Stephen stood for an instant watching him anxiously, and saw that, for the short distance he was visible, he kept straight on. He knew that, once an idea was fixed in the poor fellow's feeble mind, he would, if possible, carry it out, and now having got 'oranges,' as he called Davis—owing to his giving him some of his favourite fruit now and then—firmly into his head, he would stick to it till he found him. It was not likely anyone would speak to him at that time of night to distract his attention; at all events, it was the only thing he could do, and he hoped most earnestly that poor Abel would prove a trustworthy messenger. As soon as the sound of his footsteps had ceased, Stephen sprang over the stile, and, a little refreshed by this short pause, set out again at a brisk run.

On and on and on, till it seemed to him that he had been running for hours and would never get there. He knew perfectly well why this particular night had been chosen by these three rascals for their villainous deed. Mr. and Mrs. Yorke, with Maud and Sidney, had been staying for a fortnight at Hepburn Hall, as Mr. Yorke thought it right that

Walter should see something of his future tenants and the labourers on the estate. There had been numerous parties and gaieties of various kinds, and the valuable family plate had been brought from the bank at Beecham to add to the dignity of the entertainments. The servants who lived in the house to take care of it were an old couple, and some had been engaged temporarily, among them, Stephen supposed, the man Jem as footman. The intended robbery had probably been planned by that villain, the very thought of whom made him shiver, and the footman had doubtless been introduced into the house for that express purpose.

He understood now how Dick Foster had become possessed of the knowledge which he had used so cruelly, and, angry though he was with him, he could not help feeling some pity for one who had fallen into the merciless clutches which had been his own ruin. Poor Dick ! Well, he would tell Mr. Sidney how very unwilling he had been to go, and how his father had beaten and forced him into it. This was their last chance, for Mr. Yorke had been called away on business and the whole party would have returned to

Beecham had not Walter Hepburn sprained his ankle, which had delayed them a day or two longer.

On and on! Stephen was getting very much done up, but he kept steadily on, sometimes hoping he should get there first, sometimes dreading lest he should be too late, till at length he reached the bottom of the long avenue that led up to the Hall, and paused for a few minutes to recover his breath and think what he had better do next. He soon made his plans; he would go cautiously up to the house and see if he could discover whether Mr. Sidney was still up, and if so, endeavour to warn him. If not—and he hoped that would be the case—he would try and find the window left open by that rascal Jem, and get into the house and see what happened. If Mr. Sidney did not appear at all, he would let them have their own way, but if roused by the noise he came down, then he should be at hand to warn or help him.

Carefully keeping under the trees, he crept up to the house, dreading every moment to hear footsteps behind him; but all was quiet, nor could he see any light in the house, and he was turning away to look

for the window at the back, when a faint glimmer through one of the lower windows made him pause. After listening a moment he tapped at the window, first gently, then louder, till the shutters were unfastened and drawn back and Sidney Yorke looked out.

‘Who is there?’ he asked, pushing open the window. ‘What is it?’

‘It is I—Stephen Elliot. Let me in, sir, quick!’

‘You, Stephen!’ exclaimed Sidney. ‘What on earth brings you here at this time of night?’

‘Help me in, Mr. Sidney, and I’ll tell you. Make haste, every moment is precious.’

Much astonished, Sidney held out his hand and Stephen clambered in. The first thing he did was to close the window and fasten the shutters, and then, exhausted with his long run, he threw himself on the floor.

‘What is it, Elliot?’ asked Sidney; ‘has anything happened at the factory? Come, try and tell me what it is.’

After one or two gasps Stephen contrived to tell his story, to which Sidney listened in amazement.

‘And you have run all this way to warn me,’ he said, at length. ‘How very good of you Stephen. But the thing is what are we to do now? If Robinson were a little younger we would rouse him and greet these worthy gentlemen with a warm reception, but he would be no use, and——’

‘Oh, do keep out of their way,’ exclaimed Stephen, starting up, ‘there’s no knowing what they will do if they see you.’

‘They won’t murder me, I dare say,’ returned Sidney, lightly. ‘No Beecham man would want to do that.’

‘They are not Beecham men, one is that brute of a——that brute of a ——’ he shivered so much that he could not go on.

‘Never mind his name,’ said Sidney, soothingly; ‘perhaps it is better I shouldn’t know who he is. I thought there was something odd about that footman, though he has always been very civil and obliging to me. If, as you suspect, he is one of them, no doubt the things are all packed ready, and we might keep quiet and hope the police will be here in time to spoil their neat little game. You think they will be sure to come?’

‘Quite. Abel will be sure to give the message, and they will come on the chance of something being wrong.’

‘But I am not altogether disposed to let the rascals walk off with Mr. Hepburn’s plate without any attempt to stop them,’ continued Sidney, his eyes flashing; ‘if it were not that he is ill and my mother would be dreadfully frightened, I would try conclusions with them, come what might. We must keep them from going upstairs at any rate. Now, Stephen, at the top of the stairs is a strong door; you run up and shut it, the key is on the other side. Fasten it securely, and then creep along the passage and come down the other way. Open one of the windows and keep a sharp look out for the police, and get them in as quickly as possible. If I can get to the window I will shut it, and that will puzzle them and keep them back a few minutes. Hark! What’s that?’

They both hold their breath as a faint sound was heard.

‘I believe they are coming here. What on earth for? Ah, I know—that rascal Simms! Quick, Stephen! they are coming to the other door.’

Sidney opened the door as he spoke, 'but Stephen hung back.'

'I shall stay with you, sir,' he said, in a whisper.

'But I want you to shut that door; you'll do that, won't you? I shall be all right if you hurry the police.'

He pushed Stephen out of the room as he spoke, and much against his will he hurried across the hall.

'They are much more likely to murder him,' thought Sidney as he closed the door, 'they would guess he came to warn me. Anyhow he looks awfully bad and is safer out of the way.'

Listening for a moment he crept softly across the room, and, taking a small but heavy box off the table, he carried it to the sofa and concealed it under the cushions, throwing a rug carelessly over the top. Scarcely had he done so when the curtain over the door at the end of the room was pulled aside and two men entered.

CHAPTER XII.

A DEED OF LOVE.

THE intruders had, no doubt, expected to find the room empty and in darkness, and were evidently taken aback at the sight of Sidney. The man who entered first uttered an exclamation and retreated so suddenly as to convince Sidney that Stephen was right, and that, though well disguised, it was the footman, for whose imaginary toothache good old Mrs. Robinson had suggested so many remedies, who was thus figuring in a new character. There was a momentary pause, neither of the men seeming to know whether it would not be more prudent to retreat than to advance.

‘What do you want?’ said Sidney, at length, ‘what business have you here?’

‘Never you mind, young gent,’ growled the man, advancing; ‘just you keep quiet and not kick up a row, or else you’ll get the worst of it. It would have been better for you if you had not seen us——’

‘Or rather, let us say,’ interrupted Sidney, coolly, ‘it would have been better for *you*!’

The man scowled, and Sidney involuntarily looked round for a weapon of defence, but nothing was at hand but the poker, and before he could reach the fireplace the man would probably be upon him.

‘No go, eh!’ said the other, guessing his thoughts. ‘We’re two to one, so you had better not try that on. Jem, you dolt, be quick, can’t you?’

Thus encouraged, the other man came in, and made straight for the table where the box had been. Not finding it there, he searched hastily round the room, keeping his face as much as possible turned away from Sidney, but without success. Presently his companion joined him to assist in the search, and Sidney seized the opportunity to move quietly towards the door, as he hoped, unobserved. But, just as he touched the handle, the man saw his intention, and, not being able to reach him, he caught up a heavy inkstand and hurled it at his head.

Sidney stepped hastily back to avoid the blow, and before he could open the door he was seized and thrown violently to the ground. The attack was so

sudden that he had no time to defend himself, and came down heavily with his left hand doubled under him. A sharp pain made him aware that something had gone wrong with it, and he could not suppress a slight exclamation which brought Jem to the spot.

‘Get off, Jake,’ he said angrily, pushing him aside; and, pulling Sidney up, he dragged him on to the sofa. Then, turning to his companion, he embarked in a furious quarrel, which was carried on in such extraordinary language that Sidney could make nothing of it. It ended in the man Jake leaving the room with a handsome silver inkstand, threatening, in the most unmeasured language, to shoot Jem if he let Sidney move or make the least noise to give the alarm.

For some minutes Sidney leant back against the curtains of the sofa, rather amused at the thought that he was thus effectually guarding the very thing the men were in search of, while the quondam footman stood a little way off, evidently exceedingly uncomfortable. At last, as his wrist got more painful and he began to feel queer, he ventured to

say in a low tone, and carefully avoiding looking at him, 'Would you get me a glass of water? You will find some in the next room, and I won't move till you come back.'

The man went off instantly, returning with not only a tumbler of water, but a glass of wine, in so short a time as to show Sidney that he knew exactly where to find it.

'Thank you,' said Sidney as the other handed it to him in a very shamefaced manner, muttering something about 'he didn't want him to get hurt, and he was sorry it had happened.'

'So am I,' returned Sidney, quietly, 'very sorry for *you*.'

The man fidgeted about uneasily, and presently said, 'Won't you go, sir? He's rather an awkward customer sometimes, and he may be rather rough.'

'So it seems,' said Sidney, laughing slightly, as he dipped his handkerchief into the glass of water and bound it round his wrist; 'I suppose he wouldn't really shoot you, though, if he found I had gone?'

'Don't know about that, there's no knowing what he'll do when he is put up; but that is my look-out.'

If you'll go, I will chance it. I would almost as soon get finished outright as what I shall get now,' he added gloomily.

'Suppose we both bolt,' said Sidney suddenly, pitying the man, in spite of his indignation at his treachery. 'I'll lock myself into the other rooms and you make off through the window. If you get clear away, start fresh somewhere. Lock that door over there, that will give us more time.'

He got up as he spoke, but the other shook his head. 'He would be sure to find me,' he said; 'besides, I couldn't cut off and leave them in the lurch.'

'A case of honour among thieves,' thought Sidney. 'Well, I shouldn't care to go either, then,' he said, sitting down again, 'and risk his murdering you, though I don't believe he meant it. Let us hope he isn't such a brute as that.'

Jem looked doubtful, but he said nothing. Some little time elapsed before Jake appeared, and when he did he was evidently more 'awkward' than before. After muttering a few hasty words to Jem, he turned to Sidney. 'Look here,' he said, roughly; 'you will

just have to hold your tongue about this, and if you're asked any questions, you'll say you couldn't tell what we were like.'

'Oh! that's coming it too strong, isn't it?' remonstrated Sidney with the utmost coolness, getting up as the man approached.

'You can forget, I suppose?' said the man, fiercely. 'If you can't I'll find means to make you.'

Sidney made no reply.

'Look sharp! I've no time to waste,' continued Jake, getting more angry as he saw his threat had not the slightest effect. 'Either you'll come to terms or—' suddenly pointing a pistol full at Sidney — 'now then! will you swear you don't know either of us?'

In that short moment of time Sidney's brain seemed to whirl with the thoughts that came rushing into it; thoughts of his father and mother, of his hopes for the future, of the good he had meant to do. Was he to sacrifice his life for the sake of truth? Was he to die because he would not tell a falsehood to such a ruffianly villain as this?

To many it would have seemed excusable, but not to him. He had no time to argue with himself as to the expediency. . No time for more than a swift prayer for help—to do more than half-instinctively hold to the right. It was a lie, no matter why or to whom it was uttered, and if the scoundrel fired after all should he like to die with a lie on his lips? He stood unflinchingly with his eyes fixed on the other's face, and, when he repeated the question, answered without the smallest sign of fear:

‘No, I will not. It would be a lie!’

‘Cut it short,’ advancing a step nearer; ‘yes or no?’

‘No!’

‘Dead men tell no tales,’ said Jake, savagely, and before Jem could interfere he fired.

Meantime Stephen Elliot had locked and bolted the door, and then proceeded, as Sidney had told him, to make his way to the other staircase. He had to creep along very cautiously, as he was in utter darkness, so that it was some time before he reached the bottom of the stairs, and found himself in a long passage. His great desire was to get back to the

hall, but he did not know whether this passage would lead to it. Unluckily he turned the wrong way, and found himself in the kitchen, and getting confused he wandered about for some minutes, groping his way without much idea where he was going. He opened a door near him, and then, remembering Sidney's instructions, he crept to the window and threw it open. He had just got back to the passage when a faint light appeared at the other end, and to his horror he saw the man he most dreaded in the world come cautiously along and disappear through a door to his left.

The bewildered and semi-conscious state that had come over him in the office returned now, and he remained leaning against the wall in a half-fainting condition, till a slight noise roused him. A dread of what might have happened to Sidney seized upon him, and as the light appeared again he followed it, and concealing himself behind the curtain at the door, he overheard Jake's threats. No sooner did he understand what was going on than, regardless of his own safety, he slipped into the room. So intent were they on the matter in hand, that

$$d = \frac{1}{44} \approx 2.27\% \text{ } \Rightarrow \text{approx. } 2.3\%$$



"As Jake touched the trigger, he threw himself in front."

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none of the three noticed his entrance. He did not hesitate an instant, or stop to think of his own risk; the friend whose kindness had won his heart was in danger, and must be rescued at all costs. There was but one way to save him, and as Jake touched the trigger he threw himself in front.

A loud report, a sharp cry, and then—then with an instantaneous feeling of relief and thankfulness, Sidney knew that it was over and that he was uninjured.

For an instant Stephen staggered, then he threw himself on Jake, and grasping the pistol with both hands, he clung to it with desperate strength. Bewildered and confused by the noise and smoke, Sidney did not at first realise what had occurred, and it was not till he saw the blood dripping from Stephen's shoulder and the savage blows the infuriated ruffian was dealing at his head, that he knew at what cost his life had been saved. He would have rushed to his assistance, but the footman held him back.

'Simms!' he exclaimed, forgetting his resolution to avoid mentioning his name—'Simms! for

Heaven's sake don't let him murder the lad before our eyes, I'll get you off if I can. I'll do my best for you whatever happens. Only stop that brute, or let me.'

Almost as he spoke he was released so suddenly that he stumbled against a small table and came down with a crash, while the luckless Simms made a dash for the door, only to fall headlong into the clutches of a stalwart policeman who was in the act of opening it.

Regardless of the pain he was suffering, Stephen still held on, unconscious that a heavy blow, which would probably have brought the matter to a conclusion, had been turned aside by the interposition of a strong arm, and that the pistol hastily relinquished by his assailant, had been grasped by other hands. By this time his mind was entirely off its balance, and he continued to struggle violently, apparently quite incapable of seeing what had happened, and paying no heed to the remonstrances addressed to him in a well-known voice: '

'Elliot! give in now, there's a good fellow. Let go the pistol, lad. Come, be quiet, will you?

You'll get hurt directly. Mind his arm, Wilson; he has got shot somehow, and he doesn't know a bit what he is about. Elliot! do you hear? Give in directly, when I tell you. Ah! there he goes. He'll be quiet enough now, poor fellow.'

And as Stephen let go the pistol and reeled backwards, Davis caught him as he fell and laid him down senseless on the floor.

CHAPTER XIII.

ONLY TOO GLAD.

TEN minutes later, or so at least he would have said, Stephen Elliot opened his eyes to find himself in bed in a small room. For a minute or two he looked round with a puzzled air, and then he shut his eyes with a sigh, thinking, as far as his bewildered brain would let him think of anything, that he would not open them again at present. What would be the use? He knew he should see the same cold, clean, whitewashed walls. He thought that was over, but it seemed to have come back, and he felt very odd, and would rather not rouse himself if they would only let him alone. Of course they would not, though. He could not get up, however much they worried him. What did they want him to do? Who was speaking to him? It did not sound like——. In spite of himself, he opened his eyes, and the first thing he saw was a bright fire, burning so cheerfully as to convince him that he had been mistaken in his first impressions, and that he was not where he

had fancied himself to be. Another look showed him a pleasant-looking nurse bending over him and holding a spoon to his lips, and, understanding at last that she was telling him to drink something, he did so, and felt better.

‘Where am I?’ he said, and as she did not immediately answer he repeated the question anxiously, ‘Where am I? Not in—not in gaol?’

‘Oh! dear, no,’ said the nurse, smiling cheerfully at him. ‘You are in the hospital. You have got hurt, and we are going to look after you a bit. Don’t move, I want you to keep quite still.’

Stephen gave a sigh of relief and shut his eyes, but opened them again so suddenly that the nurse had no time to prevent him from seeing, as she wished to do, another occupant of the room. But Stephen did not seem alarmed as she feared he might be. He looked fixedly at him for a minute and then said ‘Why is he here? Oh, I remember now; but Mr. Richardson said he would wait till to-morrow. Is it to-morrow?’ looking round at the window. ‘My head hurts so, I cannot make out.’

‘Never mind,’ said the nurse, soothingly, ‘don’t trouble about it.’

‘But I must go!’ exclaimed Stephen, suddenly trying to raise himself. ‘If Mr. Davis does not find me at his house, he’ll think that I have run away, and I promised I wouldn’t.’

‘Lie still,’ said the nurse, hastily, ‘you can’t go anywhere now. You must be quiet, and do as I tell you for the present.’

Stephen sank back and lay still for some minutes; then he said, quietly, ‘Ask him to come here, please.’

The nurse looked round, and the policeman came up to the bed.

‘You will tell him I can’t come,’ Stephen said, looking up at him. ‘Did he ask Mr. Sidney about the coin?’

‘I don’t know. He didn’t tell me,’ was the reply.

Stephen looked puzzled. ‘I would have come quietly. Why did you—no, I don’t think it was you. I wish I could remember. You are not Roberts; are you?’ with a slight shiver.

‘No; you know me, surely, Elliot,’ leaning down over him. ‘You remember Wilson, don’t you?’

‘Yes, I know you now,’ looking much relieved; ‘but why are you here? Did Davis send you to fetch me?’

‘It’s all right. Davis knows where you are. He will come and see you himself presently. Don’t bother about anything till you are better.’

Stephen did not speak for some time, then he said, ‘How did I get hurt? Did you knock me down?’

‘No,’ said Wilson, ‘I didn’t touch you,’ and turning to the nurse he said in a whisper, ‘Would it be safe to ask him now?’

The nurse shook her head. ‘Wait till Dr. Murray comes,’ she said.

‘Oh, no, it wasn’t you,’ Stephen went on in a rambling manner. ‘It was—what’s the matter with my head, then? Did I fall off the wall? No, I went out and heard them talking. They were under the wall, and Hunt said—Oh! I remember,’ starting suddenly, and fixing his eyes on Wilson. ‘Where is Mr. Sidney—was he hurt?’

‘No, not much; but don’t talk any more now!’

‘I must know. You are sure he didn’t get hurt? You are not cheating me, are you?’

‘No, it was nothing to signify, I assure you,’ said Wilson, moving back as Dr. Murray came in.

Stephen repeated the question, and would not be satisfied till the doctor assured him over and over again that Sidney was all right and should come and see him the next day.

‘I remember all about it now,’ he said, faintly.

‘Did Hunt shoot you?’ asked the policeman, leaning over him.

‘Yes; but he didn’t mean to—he meant to shoot Mr. Sidney. I got between on purpose. He would have killed Mr. Sidney. Has he killed me?’ looking up at the doctor.

The nurse held some more cordial to his lips, but no one spoke.

‘I suppose he has,’ Stephen went on, rather dreamily. ‘My head was bad before. Davis knows about it, if you’ll ask him. I have tried to do my best. Wilson, come quite close, please. Will you tell Mr. Davis that I thank him for being so kind to me, and I had to go; I heard what they said and I had to save Mr. Sidney, but I would have come back. And tell Mr. Sidney not to trouble. I am only too glad I was there—he has been so good to me. Give him my love, be sure you tell him it doesn’t matter

about me. I am only too glad. I wanted to please him; but this is much better, this was really worth doing, and——' a long pause. Stephen shut his eyes, but opened them again to repeat, earnestly, 'Say just that—only too glad,' and then he closed them and lay motionless.

Meantime good Mrs. Davis, sorely perplexed at the strange fact that neither had Stephen Elliot come back nor her husband returned, opened her door at a very early hour and went down to the gate to see if she could hear or see anything of them. She had scarcely been there a moment when a neighbour rushed up, breathlessly, with the news which before many hours had passed would be an exciting topic of conversation for all the inhabitants of Beecham.

'Have you heard the news, Mrs. Davis?' she asked, eagerly.

'News! no. I've only just come out, as you may see,' returned Mrs. Davis. 'What's the matter now—town on fire, or what?'

'Worse than that,' returned the other, vastly delighted at being the first in the field; 'Hepburn Hall was broken into last night, and Mr. Sidney Yorke was murdered.'

‘Goodness me!’ exclaimed Mrs. Davis, turning pale and very much startled at such sudden bad news of the Yorke family, to whom she was much attached.

‘Where did you hear that?’

‘I heard it from Mrs. Green; but your husband was there. Hasn’t he come back yet?’

‘No,’ said Mrs. Davis, rather shortly. She had not lived in the world so many years without knowing that a story never loses in its telling, nor had she been a policeman’s wife for so long without putting aside half at least of what she had heard as being exaggeration. As a rule, she believed nothing but what John told her, and after the first moment she determined to wait till he returned before believing this news.

‘Well, somehow Abel Green found out about it and told your husband, and when he got there he found Mr. Yorke murdered and the house ransacked from top to bottom. They say there were four or five burglars there, and a lad from the factory here—Stephen something or other.’

‘Not Stephen Elliot, surely!’ exclaimed Mrs. Davis, rather dismayed.

‘Yes, that was the name, I believe. He got there first and let them in, so they say, and your husband found him there and knocked him down, and he has nearly killed him.

‘What nonsense!’ interrupted Mrs. Davis, hotly; ‘Davis knock down a mere lad like that! That’s not true, I’ll warrant. If there’s no more truth in the rest of the story than there is in that, I’ll not break my heart about Mr. Sidney just yet.’

‘Well, that’s what I heard,’ returned the other. ‘Anyway, the lad’s dying or dead, for my husband saw Davis and Wilson carry him into the hospital, and he says he looked quite done for.’

‘I’m glad John is alive, anyway,’ said Mrs. Davis, ‘and maybe I had better be getting his breakfast. He will need it, I should say, after all this;’ and as her neighbour hurried off to retail the story with more additions, Mrs. Davis went back to her house.

‘What next, Cinder?’ she said, addressing the cat, as she prepared a substantial meal. ‘I dare say there’s not much truth in any of the story. Anyhow, we will just wait till he comes home before we trouble much about it. John ill-treat a

lad, indeed! I wonder what people will say next! ' getting more indignant, ' as if, after all these years, John couldn't manage a lad like Elliot without knocking him about! That won't do for us, puss, we know better than to believe a word of it.'

' What don't you believe, wife?' asked a voice behind her.

' How you did startle me, John,' exclaimed Mrs. Davis, turning sharp round. ' What's all this about Mr. Sidney being murdered? Surely it isn't true!' seeing her husband's face.

' No, Mr. Sidney, is all right, or, at least, not much the worse. He would have been, though, if it hadn't been for that brave lad, Stephen.'

' Stephen!' exclaimed Mrs. Davis, still more amazed. ' I've been in such a way about him John; he went off last night and he has never come back. Do you know where he is?' Her husband nodded. ' Surely you didn't hurt him, John?'

' I? No, of course not, poor lad. I only wish I had been a few minutes sooner to have saved him and Mr. Sidney both. Let me have some breakfast, and I'll tell you all about it. It will be all over the town in an hour, I've no doubt.'

Mrs. Davis supplied her husband's needs without asking any more questions, though she was terribly anxious to hear about her dear Mr. Sidney; but her husband did not keep her long in suspense.

'I was half afraid Stephen was mixed up in it at first,' he concluded, 'and Dr. Murray won't let Mr. Sidney be asked any questions yet; but one of the rascals was so much upset, thinking the lad was killed outright, that he let it all out. There's not much the matter with Mr. Sidney, he was only stunned for a minute or two, but he will be terribly distressed about Stephen when he knows, though the poor boy sent him a message that he was not to trouble. He seems to have been very fond of Mr. Sidney, and glad to do anything for him.'

'Poor lad,' said Mrs. Davis, wiping her eyes; 'but perhaps he will get through it, John.'

Davis shook his head.

'Dr. Murray says not. It's not only the shot but the blows on the head. I saw he was very much upset before, and thought he would be ill unless he was kept quiet, and all the excitement must have turned his brain, even before that brute of a fellow

hit him. He was quite insensible when I was in the hospital just now. Wilson had to be there to see whether he said who shot him, and he says he asked him to tell me that he had to go, and that he would have come back, and '—Davis stopped, apparently to stroke Cinder—' to thank me for being kind to him. Well,' after a pause, during which Mrs. Davis had recourse to her handkerchief, 'I'm off to bed. I asked them to send down for me if he mentioned me again, though there's very little chance of that, I'm afraid; so call me if they do.'

'Yes, I will,' said his wife, adding, hopefully, 'after all, John, the doctors may be wrong, they are sometimes.'

So good Mrs. Davis went on with her work, cheering herself with this hope, and glad in spite of all that Mr. Sidney was safe, and that the poor boy had not only not broken his word, but had saved the life of her dear young gentleman.

'I didn't believe he would make off, that I didn't, and it wasn't likely Davis would be deceived, but I shouldn't have thought this of him. Upon my word,' putting down a dish to wipe away a tear, 'I call him

a hero now. I don't know what other folk may say, but to my mind a lad who will risk his life to save a friend who has been kind to him is a downright hero, and whether he lives or dies that's what I shall always call him.'

CHAPTER THE LAST.

A PRESENT FOR A KING.

'WAS Stephen Elliot much hurt?' was almost the first thing Sidney Yorke said when he came to himself; and though his father evaded the question, and Dr. Murray ordered him to be quiet for an hour or two, he soon discovered that they were keeping something from him, and insisted upon hearing the truth. Before the day was over he was standing by Stephen's bed, and only when assured that there was not the least chance of his knowing him would he consent to leave the lad to whom he owed his life.

He knew the doctor thought a few hours would see the end, but quite unexpectedly Stephen rallied, though only to toss about in a wild state of delirium, muttering incoherently for hours together, without any remedies taking effect on his bewildered brain. Piteous entreaties to Mr. Richardson to wait till the next day, mingled with terrified attempts to escape from Hunt, who he declared—his mind having gone back to his former acquaintance with him—had

tempted him to do wrong and then left him to bear all the punishment. At intervals he would ask anxiously if the coin had been found, or make frantic efforts to rescue Sidney from some danger which he did not seem able to understand, while through it all ran the idea that someone was preventing him from returning to Davis to keep his promise.

In vain Sidney assured him that he was quite safe; in vain Mr. Richardson, sorry now for his harshness, came day after day to see him and repeat, again and again, that he knew all about it, and was quite satisfied that he was innocent. For a few minutes Stephen would be pacified, then he would begin again, and struggle so violently to return to Davis or to get to Sidney that the nurses were obliged to hold him down in bed. Only one thing quieted him—when Davis came into the room and, holding his hands tightly, desired him to lie still, telling him, in his most authoritative manner, that he must do as he told him, and that when he wanted him he would come and fetch him.

But day after day, week after week passed by, and though he seemed to grow stronger, his mind showed

no sign of improvement, and the doctor looked graver and less hopeful as time went on. Every care that skilled nursing could give, every possible remedy that science could devise or money command, was lavished on the friendless factory lad by the wealthy manufacturer whose only son he had saved. A great doctor from London came down, to find himself, to his no little surprise, not in attendance on the owner of Hepburn Hall, or on the rich man's son, but at the bedside of an unknown lad in a hospital ward. But even he, though he bestowed as much care and thought on the case as if additional renown would follow on his success, could do no more than make one or two suggestions, and say that time alone would show whether the excitement and the blows had permanently or only temporarily affected Stephen's intellect.

The unlucky Jem had for some time been bewailing his hard lot and bitterly bewailing his folly, and his more hardened associate abusing the world in general and his ill luck in particular, before any recollection of what had happened came back to his victim.

Sidney was sitting by him one afternoon when Stephen, who had been looking at him for some time in a dreamy sort of way, said suddenly, 'Mr. Sidney, did Abel take the message? I promised him a cake and an orange if he did.'

'Yes,' replied Sidney, trying to speak quietly and in a matter-of-course way; 'he said you had promised him a cake, so I gave him a large one.'

'That's all right, then,' said Stephen; 'and he must have my buttons too. Have I been ill long, sir?'

'Some little time,' said Sidney, hardly knowing what to say, and glad that the nurse, who had gone to the door, came quickly back.

'Never mind how long you have been ill,' she said, cheerfully; 'we are going to think about getting well now.'

'You have been here often,' said Stephen, slowly, looking at Sidney. 'I wanted to ask you something, but I never could say it—what was it?' frowning and looking perplexed.

'You shall ask him another time,' interposed the doctor, who had hastened in at the nurse's message

‘I am going to send Mr. Sidney away now. You shall talk as much as you like in a few days if you will do what I tell you now.’

‘You are all very kind,’ said Stephen, faintly. ‘Come again, Mr. Sidney, won’t you?’

Sidney promised that he would, and hurried home in delight, telling everyone he met that Stephen Elliot had turned the corner at last, and he believed he was going to get well.

And so, by very slow degrees, he did. Though he was not allowed to discuss the subject, he was quite himself, and evidently knew what had happened, and the first question he asked was if Mr. Richardson was satisfied about the coin.

‘Yes, quite,’ was Sidney’s answer.

‘I was afraid you wouldn’t know if it was the same—did you?’

‘Yes, of course I did. Don’t you remember I told you, when I put it in, that I had another like it myself, and should know it anywhere?’

‘I forgot everything; but Mr. Richardson said his was like it, sir.’

‘So it was—it was mine. Mr. Hepburn took it out of my purse to show it him, and left it on the

table. There wasn't much mystery in the matter, after all.'

'But then, Mr. Richardson won't be certain now that it was not that one,' said poor Stephen, only half relieved.

'I think he will, because—look there!' and Sidney tossed both the coins on to the bed.

'Oh!' exclaimed Stephen, with a gasp. 'Who had the other, then? Where was it? Who found it?'

'Your good friend Davis found it, and it's my belief he was nearly as much pleased at finding that coin as he was at finding all Mr. Hepburn's plate.'

'They didn't get off, then, sir?'

'No; Simms gave in at once—I'm rather sorry for that fellow—and Hunt was settled after a bit of scuffle. Foster was with the cart, and——'

'Not Dick,' interrupted Stephen. Sidney nodded. 'I meant to have told you about Dick, Mr. Sidney, but I was afraid to say anything for fear of getting him into a scrape. He didn't want to go, but he couldn't help it.'

‘It is very good of you to take his part after what he said about you,’ said Sidney, when he had heard Stephen’s story. ‘I’ll take care he has a chance of doing better when he comes back, and he is better away just now.’

‘He didn’t take the money, did he, sir?’ asked Stephen, hesitatingly.

‘No, it was that scamp his father. When Davis got hold of him he found the coin in his pocket, and, as that proved that he knew something about the business, the father thought he might as well own it to save Dick from being accused of it. Dick declares that he did not know who did it, and it was seeing that the desk had been broken open that put it into his head to revenge himself on you by getting you into trouble about it.’

‘I am sorry for Dick,’ said Stephen, ‘but I am glad Mr. Richardson knows that I didn’t do it. I must work hard when I get well, and show him that I really want to do my best. It was very kind of him to let me go that night.’

‘It was very lucky for me that he did,’ said Sidney, taking Stephen’s hand and pressing it warmly. ‘I

have been positively forbidden to thank you before, Stephen, but you must know what I think about it. I owe my life to you, and I can never thank you enough; but I hope some day you will see that we appreciate your brave deed. My father says I am not to tell you now. As soon as you are well enough we are going to the sea. Dr. Murray says a long rest and change will quite set you up again.'

In vain Stephen protested that he did not want any thanks. Mr. and Mrs. Yorke hardly knew how to do enough for him, and overwhelmed him with their kindness. He said they were much kinder than he deserved, and when Walter Hepburn—who maintained that he owed all his plate to him—after suggesting, so Sidney declared, everything short of an elephant, was finally persuaded to reduce his ambitious gift to a gold watch and chain, Stephen could only be prevailed on to accept it by Walter's threats of giving it to Abel Green, who he was certain would value it quite as much as a 'jolly button.'

It was not till the last day of his happy stay at the seaside, when he had quite recovered, and was stronger than he had been since his first illness, that

Stephen heard how Sidney's father meant to show his gratitude. Mr. Yorke had watched him closely, and soon discovered that he was worth helping, and what was really the work he would like to do. He was standing on the beach, watching the gambols of Walter's big dog, when Mr. Yorke and Sidney joined him.

'Well, Elliot,' Mr. Yorke said, 'are you ready to go back to work to-morrow?'

'Yes, sir,' said Stephen, taking off his cap. 'It's time I got to work again. I've been idle long enough, and I want to——'

'To do your best to get on,' said Mr. Yorke, smiling, 'What should you say then to doing your best in an office again?'

Stephen looked up hastily. 'I can't, sir,' he said; 'no one will trust me now.'

'Oh, yes, they will!' exclaimed Sidney, quickly.

'You are to go to my uncle's office. It is all settled, and he will see that you get on. I know you will, too, like a house on fire!'

'Of course you will have to begin at the bottom of the ladder,' said Mr. Yorke; 'but I shall make it

my business to see that you are taught everything thoroughly, and you would be able to get on better there than with me. I think that is what you would like, isn't it?'

Like! Stephen could hardly believe his ears. All this time he had been secretly dreading the return to the work which he had found very hard, though he was determined not to give in.

'Do you mean it, sir?' he said, looking from Mr. Yorke to Sidney. I don't know how to thank you enough. You have been a good friend to me ever since the first day I saw you.'

'I think you have been a better friend to me,' returned Sidney.

'Yes,' interposed Walter Hepburn, coming up at that minute. 'I must say, Sid, it isn't everyone who has a friend willing to make a target of himself for stray shots at a minute's notice!'

'Anyone would have done that, sir,' said Stephen, colouring. 'Mr. Sidney gave me a chance of getting on when no one else would have trusted me, and I was very glad to be able to do a little in return.'

Mr. Yorke smiled. 'I should call it a good deal,'

he said. 'I hope Sidney may always have a friend to stand by him as well as you did. I am very glad to be able to put you in a position for which I think you are well suited, and this time I am sure you will not fail.'

Stephen could only repeat his thanks and make many inward resolutions that Mr. Sidney should not be disappointed in him by any fault on his part.

Mrs. Davis is more convinced than ever that John is always right, and a wonderful man for putting people straight; and Stephen Elliot gratefully owns that, if it had not been for his kindness and good advice, none of his good luck would have befallen him.

Poor Abel Green got his buttons, and so many cakes were showered on him that he was convinced Her Majesty had more birthdays than ordinary mortals, and was more devoted to her than ever in consequence.

Sidney is able to point triumphantly to Stephen's successful career as a proof that some of his 'pets' do turn out well, and this consoles him for many failures; but when Stephen Elliot expresses his

grateful thanks for all his help and kindness, he refuses to listen, declaring that the little he did was not worth mentioning, and that kind words cost nothing. It may be so; but his father and mother, as they look back thankfully to that eventful night, feel that if Sidney had not always been ready to do *little* deeds of kindness he would not have thought of holding out a helping hand to a chance lad whom he happened to find in trouble, and that he owes his life to the kindness and sympathy which won for him the greatest of all gifts, the love of a grateful heart, and 'Love is a present for a mighty king.'



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